



## **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

### **73. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **74. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING**

There were no declarations of party whipping.

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

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There were no public questions.

**76. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)**

There were no petitions and deputations.

**77. DRAFT MONEY PLAN 2022-27 & BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2022/23**

- 77.1 The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report and provided an overview of the draft Money Plan 2022/23 and budget book. He explained that Overview and Scrutiny Committee was being asked to consider the report and that Cabinet was being asked to resolve that the assumptions contained in the draft Money Plan and any revisions to the draft revenue budget be noted. He also confirmed that the draft Money Plan and appendices would be updated when the Council received further information regarding Local Government financing.
- 77.2 The Leader of the Council explained that the draft Money Plan outlined the Council's strategic approach to the management of its finances and covered the General Fund Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Earmarked Reserves. He noted that it also set out the significant financial risks the Council faced over the next few years and proposed action to help reduce those risks.
- 77.3 The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the major theme identified through the quarterly financial monitoring reports was the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances. She also explained that the upcoming Local Government settlement announcement could have an impact on the draft Money Plan. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources paid tribute to the Head of Policy and Resources and the Finance team for their hard work in preparing the draft Money Plan. She further noted that the budget consultation would be live online the following day, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021, and encouraged Members to promote and take part in the consultation so that as much feedback could be collected from residents as possible.
- 77.4 Councillor Wilson asked for the Cabinet Members' views as to whether the assumptions contained in the Money Plan were over optimistic on inflation, referring to his understanding that the VAT shelter reserve increase was a one-off. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the VAT shelter was a 15-year agreement following the stock transfer. He noted that the benefits were shared proportionately and were agreed at the point of the stock transfer.
- 77.5 Councillor Hilton referred to the narrative on the October Spending Review at 4.5 which suggested that through the Settlement Funding Assessment, there would be increases in funding for district Councils. He asked for an indication on what this funding would need to be spent on and whether it would be ringfenced for a particular purpose. The Head of Policy and Resources noted that the increased funding was part of the Spending Review announcement

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and that he hoped that further details would be provided in the Local Government Finance Settlement which was expected later in December.

- 77.6 The Chair referred to the Budget Pressures and Efficiencies outlined in Appendix 2 and requested clarification on the £70k savings in Democratic Services. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources clarified that financial years with no elections resulted in savings and where an election took place, it would be recorded as a cost pressure as per the 2024/25 budget increase.
- 77.7 In response to a question from Councillor Hilton relating to the savings made as a result of the Senior Management Team review, the Leader of the Council noted that one of the former Council Directors spent a considerable amount of time chairing cross-county areas and following her departure from the City Council, the County Council had decided that the role was beneficial for the County as a whole. The Leader of the Council explained that there is expected proposal for all authorities in Gloucestershire to fund a role.
- 77.8 Councillor Hilton queried whether the figures concerning GCC building improvements included in the Forecast Capital Programme at Appendix 4, would be updated as a result of the proposed office accommodation relocation. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the Capital Programme would be updated in due course to include revised costings.
- 77.9 Councillor Hilton referred to the income generated by the Council's commercial property outlined in the proposed budget 2022/23. He referred to the £4,920,972 expenditure total against the £7,572,472 in income and asked how confident the Council was that this growth would be maintained or whether the figures were overoptimistic. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that he did not feel the costings were overoptimistic. He noted that income from commercial premises such as St Oswalds had held up well despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and also confirmed that some empty units at St Oswalds had recently been filled. He confirmed that he was therefore reasonably confident in the figures. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources further commented that it was positive to see St Oswalds generating income and expressed her hope that the Kings Walk, Kings Square and Forum regeneration projects would also generate more income through increased footfall in the city.
- 77.10 In response to a request for assurances from Councillor Hilton that the projected income would materialise, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the draft Money Plan and budget were based on the best estimate at the time and that there may be minor changes over the next few months.
- 77.11 In response to a query from Councillor Sawyer on the business rates reserves and forecast position figures at 13.5, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the Business Rates reserve was in place to protect the Council and that the position would be clearer following the Local Government Settlement. The Head of Policy and

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Resources also confirmed that the figures in the table were a fair estimate based on the Spending Review indications.

- 77.12 Councillor Wilson asked for clarification on the £350k proposed budget efficiencies figure in Appendix 1. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that discussions had taken place between the Senior Management Team regarding options to make savings and possible income generation opportunities. She noted that some was an indication of savings from the office relocation proposals however she was not in a position to give further information on the 2023/24 target of £300k at that stage.
- 77.13 In response to a question from Councillor Castle regarding the income generation figures at Appendix 2 and why there was such a significant variance over the coming years, the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that these figures were based on assumptions.
- 77.14 Councillor Hilton referred to the inflation assumptions at 6.2 and noted that he had recently seen predictions from the Bank of England that inflation would exceed 5%. He asked what implications this might have on the budget calculations. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the draft Money Plan assumptions were in line with central Government expectations. She noted that if there was inflation movement between December and February 2022, the figures might be altered however it was best practice in Local Government finance to base assumptions on Government guidance.

**Performance and Resources Portfolio**

- 77.15 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised that current staff levels within her portfolio were 77 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) in post with 9.4 FTE vacancies. She noted that these figures included 9 apprentices across the portfolios, confirming therefore that the total FTE staffing level was 86.4.
- 77.16 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 situation, there continued to be uncertainty surrounding the pace of economic recovery with particular implications on her portfolio, as the Performance and Resources portfolio budget included income from Parking and Commercial Properties which were naturally sensitive to further restrictions or lockdowns. She noted therefore that there was potential for the income figures included in the budget to be subject to variations leading to potential financial pressures on the Council.
- 77.17 In terms of specific financial pressures, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised that the Council's legal service partner, One Legal, had undergone a restructure which had led to an additional £50k cost to the Council as a result of the addition of a Business Manager post. She also confirmed that an additional £70k cost pressure had been identified on salary

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costs for apprentices, since this income was now included within the apprenticeship levy pot.

- 77.18 In relation to proposed budget savings, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the Council had been advised by Civica that it would no longer be providing Revenues and Benefits services and that a decision had been made to bring the service back in-house. She noted that this was expected to provide a cost saving to the Council of £150k in 2022/23. She noted that a cost saving of £145k had been generated from the prepayment of the secondary pension contributions for the three years to March 2023. She also confirmed that there was a proposed £30k saving from the disposal of the warehouses in 2022/23 and removal of final costings associated with the buildings such as business rates and security.
- 77.19 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources explained that subject to Cabinet approval, relocating to Council owned office space within the Eastgate Shopping Centre would result in a £130k saving, and that there was also a £70k saving in the proposed budget as there was no requirement to budget for an election in 2022/23. This said, she confirmed that it would become a budget pressure in 2024.
- 77.20 She further explained that the Council was expecting a new income stream of £50k from the Food Dock development due to be completed in 2022/23.
- 77.21 In relation to her future priorities, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that her portfolio was an enabling one and that she would continue to do everything possible to support the Council Plan. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources noted that one of the priorities for her portfolio was to identify an additional premises for a new burial site since the local cemeteries were almost full. She also confirmed that transformation was a key priority and that she would oversee the transition of the waste service provider which would hopefully relieve some pressure on the customer services team. She confirmed that she was not expecting any major changes to her portfolio because of the draft Money Plan.
- 77.22 Councillor Hilton referred to a previous commitment to invest in technology and to put arrangements in place to live-webcast Council meetings. He asked for an update on how these arrangements were progressing and whether this was still a priority. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed her understanding that a potential way forward for live streaming meetings had been identified through the ModGov platform, however she understood that there was a delay with the software. She agreed to make enquiries with the Head of Service and provide the Committee with an update in due course.
- 77.23 Councillor Pullen requested some clarification as to how the car parking charges for the year had been decided, referring to the £200k shortfall in budget. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that no increase in car parking income had been assumed at this point in time but some recovery had been seen and the Council had therefore not reduced the budget. He

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confirmed that the budget equalization reserve was in place and that if income from car parking did not recover as quickly as expected, it would be possible to draw on that reserve.

**Culture and Leisure Portfolio**

- 77.24 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure advised that current staff levels within his portfolio were 35.7 FTEs in post with 5.6 FTE vacancies, and there were 41.3 FTEs in total across his portfolio. He noted that the portfolio also had occasional zero-hour workers for events where required.
- 77.25 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that 2021 had continued in a similar vein to 2020 and was a year which had brought significant challenges for the culture and leisure sector. He noted that the pandemic had dramatically impacted on the ability to provide public-centered events and services and there was the ongoing potential for short notice cancellations and reduced numbers of attendees and participants. He paid tribute to the culture team for their innovative thinking under very difficult circumstances and confirmed that the team continued to closely monitor the Arts Sector funding sources available, with successful claims having been submitted to help fund the undertaking of activities, such as improvement works at the Guildhall.
- 77.26 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that the outlook for 2022/23 continued to be uncertain however there was optimism that some semblance of normality would return. He expressed the view that there was a suppressed appetite amongst the public for cultural activities and the opportunity to attend events. He confirmed that the budget proposals were based on no income changes compared to the 2021/22 budget, noting that the achievement of those levels was very much dependent on life returning to near normality by Summer 2022.
- 77.27 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that the events management and destination marketing functions had been successfully absorbed by his team, and that there was an expectation that the destination marketing function would continue to be involved with promoting events and communicating the Council's messages during 2022/23. He noted therefore that the budget reflected an increase in income from recharging this work to other areas of the Council who had previously engaged external marketing services. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure also confirmed that the transfer of the former Museum of Gloucester Life buildings to Gloucester Historic Buildings Ltd and the Civic Trust was completed back in August and that savings would be generated once the museum collection had been appropriately reviewed and archived.
- 77.28 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure noted that there were no new proposed budget savings in his portfolio for 2022/23. He also confirmed that whilst there were no specific new income streams expected, the team would

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continue to monitor any future sector specific grants and would continue to identify and implement new ways of increasing profitability of commercial activities.

- 77.29 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that there had not been any changes in his portfolio as a result of the draft Money Plan, and that his priority was to continue with the Cultural Strategy vision to put Culture at the heart of Gloucester. He expressed the hope that Gloucester would become well known for its innovative and distinctive culture, which would be diverse and community based with a strong focus on young people. He confirmed that some of his priorities included a comprehensive Museums Development Plan, a cinema refresh, proposals for Cultural Development Funding and to make the Guildhall a leading venue, with a full festivals and events calendar.
- 77.30 Councillor Hilton acknowledged that the cultural sector had experienced a very challenging period of time as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and asked for the Cabinet Members' views on whether improving participation in events would help reduce cost pressures and lead to a more dynamic city. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure noted that footfall in the city had improved and that he would be looking at engagement opportunities. He noted his view that the position was moving in the right direction.
- 77.31 Councillor Wilson asked whether Guildhall event calendar had a healthy population of bookings over the coming months. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that there was, however the situation was very much reliant on whether there were Covid-19 restrictions placed on cultural venues in the future.
- 77.32 In response to a question from Councillor Pullen regarding the renewal of the Aspire contract, the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that work to review the contract was underway.
- 77.33 Councillor Pullen referred to the proposed budget figure for Aspire of £346,450 and asked whether this included repair costs as well as the cost of providing services. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that it did include utility costs and explained that the Council paid these costs initially, and subsequently recharged Aspire for the costs incurred. He explained that the Council had not sought repayment of the costs prior to May 2021 due to the restrictions on leisure venues over the course of 2020 and early 2021, however the Council had been reclaiming these costs since the restrictions were lifted.
- 77.34 In response to a request from the Chair for an update on the museum collection review, The Head of Culture confirmed that colleagues were currently working through the review and archiving process with assistance from the Folk of Gloucester Museum. He confirmed that this process was a priority for his team, but noted that there were also a number of other projects underway, including a review of historical statues and monuments in Gloucester to identify whether any had a connection with the transatlantic slave trade.

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**Environment and Leader Portfolio**

- 77.35 The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that current staff levels within his portfolio were 27.2 FTEs in post with 2.6 FTE vacancies, leaving 29.8 FTEs in total.
- 77.36 In relation to financial pressures and potential reductions in income streams, he explained that the budget for Waste services included an additional £580k as a result of inflationary increases and the forecast pressures arising from the service transfer from Urbaser to Ubico in Spring 2022. The Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed that these figures would be refined and adjusted for the 2023/24 budget. He explained that under the new arrangement, the Council would be responsible for the management and sale of recycling commodities collected, and there was therefore an income target of £520k for 2022/23, an increase of £100k over the current target.
- 77.37 The Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed that following the retirement of the two Corporate Directors, a review of the senior management structure had taken place which resulted in a £125k saving. He noted that aside from the sale of recycling commodities which he mentioned earlier, there were no new income streams anticipated for his portfolio, however officers were clear in their understanding that opportunities to raise additional income should always be considered. The Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed that all income streams within his portfolio continued to meet targets including services such as bulky waste collection.
- 77.38 The Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed that his main priorities going forward were to ensure that Gloucester weathered the Covid-19 pandemic safely, to improve waste and recycling performance and to continue providing effective services for residents. He referred to the ongoing regeneration in the city and confirmed that this was also a top priority for Cabinet.
- 77.39 Councillor Hilton referred to previous difficulties with missed recycling collections in some areas of the city and asked whether the Cabinet Member was confident that the problem would be resolved. The Cabinet Member for Environment noted that many Councils were dealing with the challenge of HGV driver shortages and were also seeing their service impacted by Covid-19. He mentioned that since his statement at full Council, there had been several Covid-19 cases within the collection team, and this had affected the bubble arrangements within the team. He also confirmed that out of the 5 newly recruited drivers, only 2 remained in City Council employment. He noted that the challenges were nationwide and unprecedented.
- 77.40 In response to further comments from Councillor Hilton as to the impact of Brexit on the HGV driver shortages, the Cabinet Member for Environment



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noted that the issues may also be down to the delays with accessing test slots due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

- 77.41 Councillor Pullen asked for an update on the Food Safety Inspector (EHPs) staffing situation. The Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed his understanding that there were no major staffing challenges however he acknowledged that Covid-19 situation had resulted in some delays. Further to Councillor Pullen's request at the previous Overview and Scrutiny meeting for clarification on how many EHPs were employed by the Council, it was agreed that enquiries would be made with the Head of Service and an update would be provided to Members in due course.

**Communities and Neighbourhoods Portfolio**

- 77.42 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods advised that current staffing levels within his portfolio were 16.7 FTEs in post with 0.5 FTE vacancies. He confirmed that the FTE total for his portfolio was 17.2.
- 77.43 He confirmed that no major pressures had been identified within his portfolio for next year, noting that the story for 2020 and 2021 had significantly focused around responses to and varied impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's service delivery. He explained that during the past year, the Community Wellbeing team had managed various Covid-19 grants from central Government, and via the County Council.
- 77.44 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods further explained that those grants ensured that the additional service provisions which were needed in response to the pandemic were achievable. He noted that a challenge going forward was to ensure the continuation of the positive aspects of the additional services in ways which were affordable to the Council. He confirmed that officers would continue to monitor requirements and explore affordable responses. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods also mentioned that the Community Grants budget had been increased by £15k to include a commitment previously made to the Community Builders CIC to provide this grant funding in 2022/23 and a similar amount in 2023/24.
- 77.45 In terms of proposed budget savings and any new income streams, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods confirmed that there were no specific savings targets within his portfolio for 2021/22 and no new income streams identified.
- 77.46 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods confirmed that his main priorities going forward were to continue to invest in community building across the city, increase partnership work and promote community resilience. He also committed to maintaining the Council's Purple Flag status, to continue to tackle inequality and anti-social behaviour (ASB), confirming the recent renewal of PSPOs in the city.

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- 77.47 In response to a question from the Chair regarding Shopmobility, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods confirmed that he was not aware of any long-term risk to its future.
- 77.48 Councillor Hilton referred to the PSPOs and asked whether there would be any additions or geographical changes following the renewal. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods confirmed that there would likely be both as it was a working document subject to change. He noted that the public consultation would help inform these changes, and that the measures in place in the London Road area were working.
- 77.49 In response to a further question from Councillor Hilton, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods confirmed that some additional aspects could include licensing around alcohol in some areas. The Head of Communities confirmed that further PSPOs could be put in place if required.

**Planning and Housing Strategy Portfolio**

- 77.50 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy advised that current staffing levels within his portfolio were 47.2 FTEs in post with 4.6 FTE vacancies. He confirmed that the FTE total for his portfolio was 51.8.
- 77.51 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that the review of the Joint Core Strategy would continue in 2022/23 and that a further £10k had been identified as the additional annual contribution to the costs of its production. He explained that the planning making strategy for the Joint Core Strategy authorities as a whole was continuously being reviewed so as to minimise any future financial pressures.
- 77.52 In respect of further financial pressures, he noted that pressures in relation to income from the planning service had been identified, as the statutory nature of the fees which Councils could charge often prevented the costs of providing the service from being recouped in full. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that a forecast for planning income was currently being finalised, however it was important to bear in mind that the Council had no control over the timing of planning submissions and the figure would therefore be kept under review. He stated his hope that some major development projects planned within the city would boost this income in the next year and confirmed that officers would continue to monitor the situation.
- 77.53 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy noted that the Council had continued to identify opportunities to improve access to temporary, supported and permanent accommodation through repurposing existing properties and land in the city. He referred to the purchase of Jubilee House to complement the properties it holds for such purposes. He explained that this, along with the collaboration with the YMCA in respect of

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the management of Potters Place had increased the number of properties available for placement of individuals and families within Gloucester, leading to savings of £200k.

- 77.54 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that the Council continued to bid for the various available Government funding and noted that the Council had received several grants which would allow further development of housing opportunities for those in need, including a recent £2m grant for St Oswalds. He noted that a Housing Projects and Strategy team had been established to further develop the housing opportunities and stated that the Council was also closely involved with the Countywide Housing Partnerships team, who were managing significant grant funded projects across the six districts. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that the Council was forecast to spend its entire DHP budget this year which had assisted more people to remain in their home or find a new home.
- 77.55 He confirmed that no new income streams had been identified for his portfolio for the coming year, however officers would continue to promote the use of Planning Performance Agreement where appropriate.
- 77.56 In relation to the future priorities for his portfolio, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that the main priorities were the adoption of the City Plan, the continuing review of the Joint Core Strategy and the relevant governance arrangements for the JCS. He committed to continue working with Gloucester City Homes and Matson and Podsmead groups to identify regeneration opportunities and stated his hope that there would be a continued improvement of performance in housing and a continuation of the positive trend seen. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed his intention to continue working with the Countywide Housing Partnership and partner organisations to reduce street homelessness.
- 77.57 Councillor Hilton referred to the City Plan and asked whether the Council intended to accept all of the 66 recommendations from the Planning Inspector. He also asked for the Cabinet Member's comments as to why the City Plan had taken such a long time to come to fruition. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that the Planning Policy Members Working Group would be meeting shortly and that it was anticipated that the City Plan would be adopted, and work commenced next year. He noted that the process was set out in statute and recommendations from the Planning Inspector were standard part of this process. The Head of Place further explained that the recommendations from the Planning Inspector were not major modifications and confirmed that it was still the intention for the City Plan to be brought to Cabinet in January 2022.
- 77.58 Councillor Wilson referred to the Planning Budget for 2022/23 and the figures relating to employees. He asked whether there was any intention to reduce staff in this service area and if so why this was the case, given his understanding that planning was not a particularly over-resourced area. The

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Head of Place provided reassurances that there were no plans to reduce headcount in this service area.

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

**78. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

**Time of commencement: 6.56 pm hours**

**Time of conclusion: 8.29 pm hours**

**Chair**