



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING** : Monday, 8th January 2024

**PRESENT** : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Pullen (Vice-Chair), Ackroyd, Campbell, Castle, Evans, Hilton, Hudson, Hyman, Kubaszczyk, Sawyer, Wilson and Zaman

### **Others in Attendance**

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment,  
Councillor Richard Cook  
Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor  
Hannah Norman

Corporate Director  
Head of Finance and Resources  
City Growth and Delivery Manager  
Policy and Governance Manager  
Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

**APOLOGIES** : Cllr. Dee

### **71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair declared an interest in Agenda Item 10 (Proposed Sale of Land at Podsmead for the Purpose of Commencing Regeneration) owing to his position as the local ward Member for Podsmead and the fact that he had previously expressed his support for the scheme. He withdrew from the entire duration of the item and took no part in the discussion.

### **72. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING**

There were no declarations of party whipping.

### **73. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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

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There were no public questions.

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

There were no petitions nor deputations.

**76. PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

76.1 The Leader of the Council, Councillor Cook, introduced the report. He advised Members that it sought to share the findings of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Team's feedback report further to their visit in October 2023 to review the Council's progress towards the implementation of the recommendations from the Peer Challenge in November 2022.

76.2 Councillor Cook outlined the themes considered by the Peer Team and noted that the Council had also asked them to provide feedback on its response to the cyber incident and work undertaken to tackle inequalities. Councillor Cook further highlighted that the Peer Team had seen evidence of and welcomed the Council's evolved approach to performance management and had also welcomed the increase in capacity at Senior Management level and Major Project work. He explained that the full Progress Review was included at Appendix 1.

76.3 The Chair referred to the statement in the report that the Peer Team had not yet seen evidence of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee providing critical challenge. He expressed the view that the Committee worked effectively and noted that he had not been approached to give evidence as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He asked what more the Committee should be doing to fulfil this recommendation. The Corporate Director noted that it was possible that the Peer Team felt that not enough time had passed to see evidence of the Committee working in the way it should and suggested that the Chair approach the Lead Peer member for further advice.

76.4 In response to a further question from the Chair regarding external communications, Councillor Cook noted that any dedicated LGA Communications Peer Review would likely come at additional cost for the Council, however the Progress Review report had highlighted that external communications had improved.

76.5 In response to concerns raised by Councillor Hilton regarding the narrative around the Aspire Leisure Trust, Councillor Cook stated that the Trust had been contracted to provide leisure services on behalf of the Council until September 2024, following the options appraisal conducted by SLC consultancy. He noted that the Trust had initially agreed to extend the contract until September 2024, but had changed their position shortly before announcing their immediate liquidation.

76.6 Councillor Hilton referred to the narrative at 3.10.4 in the report regarding Member behaviour. He noted that as leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, he had not received any complaints from Officers regarding the behaviour of

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any Liberal Democrat Councillors and that Liberal Democrat Councillors behaved politely and respectfully to Council Officers.

- 76.7 Councillor Wilson expressed his disappointment at the statements around Member behaviour.
- 76.8 Councillor Pullen noted that he was disappointed by the observation of the Peer Team that some Members behave badly. He stated that he had not been made aware of any complaints about the behaviour of Labour Councillors. Councillor Pullen noted that Code of Conduct protocols had been reviewed by the Monitoring Officer and asked whether these related to Member or Officer Code of Conduct. It was confirmed that both Member and Officer Codes of Conduct had been reviewed, and that the Updated Member Code of Conduct had already been considered by General Purposes Committee and Council. It was confirmed that the updated Officer Code of Conduct was due to be considered at the upcoming General Purposes Committee meeting and would later be put forward for approval by Council.
- 76.9 In response to a query from the Chair as to whether there would be any more steps to the Peer Review, Councillor Cook confirmed that the Peer Review process was complete.

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

**77. EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF) GLOUCESTER URBAN GREENING PROJECT**

- 77.1 Councillor Cook introduced the report and explained that it sought to provide an overview of the completed ERDF funded 'Urban Greening Project'. Councillor Cook advised that the project completion had been delayed by a year due to several factors including the Covid-19 pandemic, however practical completion had been achieved on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023.
- 77.2 Councillor Cook advised Members that the key interventions delivered under the project were outlined in Table 2, and that the project had delivered benefits including improved habitat and biodiversity, flood mitigation, physical and mental wellbeing for residents, water quality improvements and urban cooling. He further noted that the work undertaken through the project had received considerable praise and had also delivered on social value. Councillor Cook explained that the UK was not eligible for future ERFD funding having left the European Union, however alternative funding streams were available for future biodiversity improvement, flood mitigation and water quality projects.
- 77.3 The Chair expressed the view that both the report and the scheme were excellent and stated that he would urge the Council to apply for alternative funding streams as often as possible. He referred to the narrative at 10.1 in the report and asked whether the Council planned to maintain the areas which had seen ERDF interventions. Councillor Cook confirmed that the Council did intend to maintain the areas identified in the report, and that there had been handover meetings with the Open Spaces Team.

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- 77.4 In relation to a query from Councillor Wilson regarding the maintenance costs associated with the project, Councillor Cook confirmed that these would need to come out of Council's normal budget, and that it was unlikely that the Council would be able to reclaim for administrative costs.
- 77.5 Councillor Sawyer referred to the narrative at 3.1 in the report and asked for clarification on the issues experienced with the initial contractor and whether there were any opportunities for the Council to learn lessons. It was agreed that further details would be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course.
- 77.6 In response to a further query from Councillor Sawyer as to how improvements to water quality in Gloucester were being measured and who was responsible for undertaking this work, it was agreed that follow-up enquiries would be made and that this information would be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course.
- 77.7 Councillor Sawyer asked how the Council measured and quantified social value activity. The Corporate Director confirmed that the Council had made social value commitments and had to deliver on these inputs. She noted that she was in the process of reviewing the social value policy and confirmed that she would be happy to share further information to Overview and Scrutiny Members.
- 77.8 Referring to the narrative at 7.4 and the statement that delivering the ERDF funded project was bureaucratic, Councillor Sawyer asked whether the Council had learnt any lessons from these challenges. Councillor Cook confirmed that the Council would learn lessons if there were any to be learnt, however it was his understanding that the bureaucracy was caused by European legislation.
- 77.9 Councillor Castle asked when the Plock Court wetland extension work would be completed. Councillor Cook advised that the ERDF project work was complete and agreed that he would ask the relevant Officers for an update on the wetland extension.

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

**78. CEMETERY RULES AND REGULATIONS REVIEW**

- 78.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Norman, introduced the report and confirmed that it sought to outline the proposed changes to the rules and regulations for Gloucester Cemeteries following a decision by Council to review the 2014 rules. Councillor Norman explained that the proposed changes were set out in Appendix 2 and included the allowance of a concrete border and grass seeding graves once they had reached final settlement. She further advised Members that the report proposed a public consultation, and it was the intention to bring a further report to Cabinet in March to approve the final proposals following the consultation.

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- 78.2 The Chair highlighted a typing error at 3.2 which referred to ‘church years rather than ‘church yards.’
- 78.3 Councillor Hilton referred to the requirement for borders to be made of granite or concrete materials and asked whether these materials complied with the Council’s carbon neutral aspirations. Councillor Norman noted that this would be followed-up with the Council’s Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead after the public consultation.
- 78.4 Councillor Pullen observed that the report was an interesting read and asked for further information as to who would be invited to participate in the public consultation. Councillor Norman confirmed that she intended for the consultation to be as broad as possible. She advised that the Council would be sharing the consultation on social media, the designated consultations web page on the Council website, and through the weekly bereavement coffee morning as a focus setting. She further confirmed that there would be engagement with local funeral directors and notices of the consultation around graves in the cemeteries.
- 78.5 Councillor Sawyer noted that she was pleased to see the proposed changes around grass seeding. In response to Councillor Sawyer’s reflection on her personal experience, Councillor Norman asked that she contact her directly to discuss her concerns.
- 78.6 Councillor Wilson referred to the narrative at 3.2 and the proposal that no glass of any kind should be placed on the graves. He asked whether ornaments, such as glass jars, would be permitted. Councillor Norman explained that Officers had researched the approach taken by other Councils and noted that all broken glass had the potential to cause accidents to adults and children.
- 78.7 In response to a query from the Chair as to next steps, Councillor Norman confirmed that if approved by Cabinet, the proposals would go out to public consultation with a view of Cabinet approving the final proposals in March. She noted that where plots had been purchased with a deed in place, the rules at the time of the deed being made would apply and therefore there may be some variances across the cemeteries.
- 78.8 In response to an additional query from the Chair, Councillor Norman confirmed that Members were welcome to contribute to the consultation.

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

**79. PROPOSED SALE OF LAND AT PODSMEAD FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMMENCING REGENERATION**

*Having declared an interest in the item, the Chair withdrew himself from the Chamber at this point in the meeting. The Vice-Chair, Councillor Pullen, chaired the item.*

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- 79.1 The Vice-Chair reminded Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members that the subject matter of the report was the Heads of Terms of the disposal of the Podsmead sites rather than the detail of the Podsmead regeneration scheme, which could be subject to an outline planning application in due course.
- 78.2 Councillor Norman introduced the report and advised Members that Cabinet was being asked to approve the draft Heads of Terms for the disposal of the sites within the Council's ownership in Podsmead to Gloucester City Homes (GCH). She stated that the proposal was to sell the sites at a sum below market consideration in order to deliver specific Council objectives, noting that disposing of the land at an undervalue would be a key consideration for Cabinet to take into account.
- 79.3 Councillor Norman provided some background information about the proposed scheme and noted that it included regeneration benefits including 117 new homes, with 107 of these being affordable homes, community space and park and play facilities. This said, she explained that completion of the scheme was subject to several factors, including the securing of planning permission. She also reminded Members that due to the prospect of a future planning application, the discussion at Overview and Scrutiny Committee should centre around the Heads of Terms as the main subject of the report.
- 79.4 Councillor Wilson referred to the planned demolition of 64 existing homes and asked whether residents of those homes would have guaranteed allocation of new homes in the estate. The City Growth and Delivery Manager confirmed that these residents would be given first choice on the new homes but would be able to opt to move out of the estate if they so wished.
- 79.5 In response to a further question from Councillor Wilson regarding the allocation of homes to families, the City Growth and Delivery Manager confirmed that the responsibility for housing allocation would remain with GCH, and that they would undertake housing needs assessments accordingly.
- 79.6 Councillor Wilson asked for clarification as to the number of new homes included in the scheme. Councillor Norman explained that GCH had needed to review the scheme to reflect the current market, and that the whole regeneration scheme would include 177 new homes, of which 107 would be on the Council's land.
- 79.7 Councillor Hilton referred to the grant funding bid to Homes England and noted his understanding that if the funding was not spent in its entirety, the remaining funds would need to be returned to Homes England. He asked how the Council was ensuring that it was maximising on the scheme, noting that the land was being sold below market value. The City Growth and Delivery Manager confirmed that if the scheme went ahead, the Council would be enabling regeneration as well as facilitating the provision of more affordable homes in the city. He further noted that Homes England would be

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conducting a detailed valuation in due course. Councillor Norman highlighted that if Cabinet supported the recommendations, the next steps were outlined at 9.1 in the report.

- 79.8 Councillor Hilton raised concerns about the loss of Open Space if the scheme were to go ahead. He asked what guarantees would be put in place to protect the remaining land and whether the Council would retain any control in this area. Councillor Norman stated that she assumed there would be covenants on the land as part of the process. The City Growth and Delivery Manager further confirmed that a management plan would be in place as set out in the Heads of Terms at Appendix 1.
- 79.9 In response to a query from Councillor Sawyer as to the £1 consideration, the City Growth and Delivery Manager explained that this was a nominal figure however there had to be value on the land in order to transfer the site ownership.
- 79.10 In response to a further query from Councillor Sawyer as to whether the decision would be put to full Council, Councillor Norman confirmed that this was a Cabinet decision, and that Cabinet was being asked to give delegated to authority to Officers.

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

**80. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN**

- 80.1 Councillor Hilton noted his interest in considering the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and the Gloucester Growth Strategy, noting that these reports had not yet been added to the Cabinet Forward Plan. He suggested that major decisions which were due to go to full Council be postponed until after the May 2024 Local Elections.
- 80.2 The Corporate Director confirmed that it was likely that the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey would be added to the Cabinet Forward Plan for March 2024. The City Growth and Delivery Manager confirmed that it was likely that the Growth Strategy would be postponed until after the May 2024 Local Elections.
- 80.3 Councillor Hilton highlighted that he was particularly keen to consider the Housing Stock Survey report and stated that he hoped that due consultation would be taken with local ward Members. Councillor Norman confirmed that she was happy to take this back to relevant Officers.
- 80.4 Councillor Sawyer requested an update on the Asset Management Strategy. Councillor Norman explained that this document required the combining of multiple policies and that as the Property and Commissioning Manager had left the Council, the Investment Manager would now be overseeing this work. Councillor Norman advised that it was unlikely that the Asset Management Strategy would be ready before the pre-election period.

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**RESOLVED: –**

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

**81. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 at 6.30pm.

**Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours**

**Time of conclusion: 7.35 pm hours**

**Chair**