



CABINET

MEETING : Wednesday, 10th January 2024

PRESENT : Cllrs. Cook (Chair), Norman (Vice-Chair), Lewis and Padilla

Others in Attendance

Cllrs Hilton, Radley and Wilson

Director of Communities

Head of Finance and Resources

Monitoring Officer

Head of Place

Head of Transformation and Commissioning

Head of Culture

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllr. S. Chambers

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

64. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2023 are confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

65. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer read the following question submitted by a member of the public:

I am still awaiting a second reply from your Asset Management & Property Services. I asked for transparency and the process by which the land earmarked for Housing at Blackbridge got made surplus to requirements. My email was sent under the Environmental Information Regulations, and they had 20 working days to reply, but I am still waiting 3 months later.

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The process did not adhere to paragraph 99 of the NPPF, exception one whereby a robust and up to date assessment should be done. The Council apparently deemed it surplus to requirements at a meeting in 22/10/2014. Did the Council show that the purpose of the appropriation was in the interests of proper planning for the area, and with regard to its current use for sport, or was it for the purely financial motive of being able to release the rest of the land to the City Council/BCCBS for a nominal amount? The response so far has been inadequate so before taking this to the LA Ombudsman please can you evidence that proper procedures were carried out.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources gave the following response:

It was the County Council who owned the land and deemed it surplus. The question refers to the actions and procedures of the County Council, suggest the question is raised with the County Council. We are not aware that the City Council has received any request under the Environmental Information Regulations.

66. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

67. LEADER AND CABINET MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

In respect of question 3 Councillor Hilton advised that in his experience inflation would increase costs in the two years allowed for the delivery of the project. He sought reassurance that the Council can raise its contribution if required. The Leader of the Council commented that it was too early in the process to make a commitment but stated that he was confident the project would be delivered successfully.

In respect of question 4 Councillor Hilton noted the importance of the public and all Council Members being able to contribute to the regeneration project. He enquired when the project plan would be shared. The Leader of the Council confirmed that it was intended to be shared with all Council Members by March 2024.

In respect of question 5 Councillor Hilton informed Members that he believed that professional gardeners, as contracted by other councils through Ubico Ltd, had the contacts and expertise to get the best out of volunteers and improve the focal point gardens that otherwise look scruffy. He asked if the Cabinet Member for Environment would reconsider the 2011-12 scheme. The Cabinet Member for Environment noted that cost had been a major factor in the original decision. He acknowledged that some areas might appear scruffy at times but cautioned against taking a retrograde step when so much had been done to encourage wildflowers and plants benefitting bees. The Cabinet Member for Environment expressed confidence that the Open Spaces Strategy Team Leader and the volunteers would improve the focal point gardens.

In respect of question 9 Councillor Wilson sought clarification of exactly when the draft accounts would be published given their importance. The Cabinet Member for

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Performance and Resources apologised for not previously advising the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee (Cllr Wilson) of the change in priorities regarding the auditors. She stated that she was about to meet the Head of Finance and Resources to discuss the timetable and would share the outcome.

In respect of question 10 Councillor Wilson queried whether the draft accounts were still on course to be published before the May 2024 local elections. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the intention was still to publish them before purdah so that they could be debated at Council in March.

In respect of question 11 Councillor Radley asked why the date of the last visit was not provided. The Leader of the Council invited the Head of Place to respond. The Head of Place advised that he had been unable to find the date in time for the published response but gave assurance that it would be provided in writing.

In respect of question 13 Councillor Radley apprised Members that residents had informed her that they felt like their concerns were being passed between agencies akin to a shell game. She sought reassurance that they would be taken seriously. The Leader of the Council invited the Head of Place to respond. The Head of Place made it clear that whenever an enforcement matter is received, whether it relates to planning or environmental health, it should and will be investigated.

68. PEER CHALLENGE PROGRESS REVIEW

Cabinet considered the report of the Leader of the Council that shared the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge Team's feedback report from October 2023 and provided an update on the recommendations.

The Leader of the Council summarised the report. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources placed on record her thanks to the members of the Corporate Peer Challenge Team involved in what she had observed to be a very helpful return visit. She highlighted the positive feedback (appendix 1) and commented that it was great to demonstrate transparency and progress which she was confident would continue. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure stated that this critical friend approach to scrutinising the Council was good and had generated useful feedback.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods particularly welcomed the development of a strategic priority framework to tackle inequalities (4.1). He noted that this complemented work being done by partners such as the NHS and would make the authority more inclusive of and responsive to the diverse health needs of all residents.

RESOLVED that the:

- (1) Corporate Peer Team Progress Review report is welcomed;

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- (2) progress report is circulated to Members, officers and partners involved in the Corporate Peer Challenge and made available to the public via the Council's website;
- (3) Action Plan updates prepared for the Peer Team ahead of their October 2023 visit are noted.

69. EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF) GLOUCESTER URBAN GREENING COMPLETION REPORT

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Environment that gave an overview of the recently completed ERDF funded 'Urban Greening Project'.

The Cabinet Member for Environment outlined the background to the project partnership and the reasons behind its delay (3.1). He drew Members' attention to the key interventions and benefits delivered (3.4), awards received (3.5), public praise quoted (3.7) but not least the almost £200,000 of social value generated (4.2). He reminded them that the interventions were required to be maintained for seven years and that despite ERDF funding no longer being available, there had already been successful funding bids for future projects (7.2-3).

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure commented that this was part of the ongoing transformation of the City into a better place to live to the benefit of everyone. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods noted that Matson has wildflower meadows that residents appreciate and hoped that the partners and sources of funding identified in the report would contribute to their future development.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report and success of the project are noted.

70. COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNT FOR CARE LEAVERS

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that proposed a change to the Council Tax Discount Scheme for Care Leavers amending the definition of a care leaver to a young person between the ages of 18 and 24 residing in Gloucester.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources outlined the background to the report and advised that its recommendations would strengthen the Council's commitment to supporting care leavers. The Cabinet Member for Environment commented that the proposed change would give people who had experienced an unstable upbringing more time to develop life skills. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods stated that they would provide crucial support for independent living thus increasing people's chances to lead fulfilling lives.

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RESOLVED that:

- (1) the definition of a care leaver, for the purpose of the policy, is changed to the following:

a young person aged 18–24 who was formerly a child in the care of Gloucestershire County Council or other local authority in England and then became a 'Former Relevant Child' as defined by The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The Care Leaver must be resident and liable for council tax on a property in the Gloucester City Council area

- (2) eligibility criteria is changed to the following:

A Care Leaver must be aged 18–24 years old to qualify for a reduction under the Council Tax Discount Scheme for Care Leavers. A Care Leaver will cease to qualify for the discount from the date of their 25th birthday

- (3) the changes approved at (1) and (2) above are implemented from 1st April 2024.

71. COUNCIL TAX - SECOND HOMES PREMIUM AND AMENDMENTS TO THE EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that recommended that from 1st April 2025 council tax be increased for properties occupied only periodically and for empty homes.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources highlighted the benefits of the proposed increases (5.1-3), among them returning empty properties back into use in line with the Council's Long Term Empty Property Strategy and generating additional income. The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that the changes would help with homelessness in Gloucester and that they were being encouraged by central government with its recent 'Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill'. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure commented that the proposals would result in either more accommodation for residents or more Council revenue. This will give the message that if people wanted to keep homes empty then they would have to pay for the privilege.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (1) council tax be increased for all properties which are occupied periodically by 100% from 1st April 2025 subject to any exemptions set out in subsequent Regulations and for implementation to be in accordance with those Regulations and guidance and
- (2) the council tax empty homes premium be increased to 100% for properties empty for between one and five years (currently between two

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and five years), from 1st April 2025 subject to any exemptions set out in subsequent Regulations and guidance.

72. PROPOSED DISPOSAL OF LAND FOR BLACKBRIDGE SPORTS HUB

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that brought to Members' attention an objection received, following the publication of an S123 Notice, to the proposed disposal of public open space at Laburnum Road Podsmead intended for Blackbridge Sports Hub.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources summarised the report. She informed Members that she agreed with the officers' response to the objection (Appendix 2) and reminded them that delivery of the Blackbridge sports hub was a key Council priority. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure apprised Members that although he understood the objection, he nevertheless believed the sports hub would become a wonderful asset for the whole community and a welcome addition to healthy opportunities available in the City. The Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed that he found the officer's response sensible.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the objection received in response to the S123 Public Notices for the disposal of open space is noted;
- (2) following the consideration of the objection, that authority is given for the grant of a 125-year lease to Blackbridge Charitable Community Benefit Society (CCBS) on terms to be determined by the Head of Finance and Resources in consultation with the Asset Management Team.

73. REVIEW OF GLOUCESTER CEMETERY RULES AND REGULATIONS

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that outlined proposed changes to the rules and regulations for the Gloucester Cemeteries following a decision by Council to review the 2014 rules.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources drew Members' attention to the proposed rule changes (Appendix 2) and reminded them that they had been directed by Council (16th November 2023 minute 53.15) to conduct a public consultation on the matter. She further commented on the importance of giving bereaved families certainty and cemetery staff clear instructions in time for the spring maintenance to commence. The Cabinet Member for Environment noted that the proposed changes were in line with the comparative rules from other authorities (Appendices 4-7). She thanked officers for their timely and thorough work.

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RESOLVED that:

- (1) the proposed changes to the rules and regulations of Coney Hill and Tredworth Cemeteries in Appendix 2 of the report is noted;
- (2) authority is delegated to the Head of Finance and Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Performance & Resources to undertake a public consultation on the proposed changes;
- (3) on conclusion of the consultation, a report will be brought to Cabinet on the outcome of the consultation with recommendations, where appropriate, to change the rules and regulations for Coney Hill and Tredworth Cemeteries.

74. EVENTS AND FESTIVALS REPORT ON 2023 & PLAN FOR 2024-25

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure that provided a review of festivals and events activity in 2023 and proposed both a programme with budget for 2024-25 and an approach for funding.

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure informed Members that although 2023 had been a very busy year for events in Gloucester he anticipated that 2024 would be even busier, not least with the three-day Tall Ships Festival. He pointed to the proposals to empower communities (3.7) to shape and contribute to festivals and events and their positive contribution to inclusiveness. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure took the opportunity to urge everyone to visit the Visit Gloucester website and see for themselves the exciting activities ahead.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods commended the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Head of Culture and his team for their work. He noted the support given to national festivals celebrated by the Polish, Filipino and other ethnic communities which he believed enriched Gloucester's social fabric. The Cabinet Member for Environment commented on the success of 2023 and looked forward to more in 2024. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure thanked the Head of Culture and his team. He reminded Members that their track record of successful cultural activities and events derived from hard work and years of planning which had put the City on the map, made people happier and benefited the whole county not just Gloucester.

RESOLVED that the:

- (1) review of festivals and events activity 2023 is noted;
- (2) proposed events for 2024 subject to full Council approval of budget for 2024-25 are approved;
- (3) approach taken to funding festivals and events is noted;

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- (4) funding allocation of the Outdoor Events Fund for 2024-25 is approved, subject to full Council approval of budget for 2024-25.

75. TRANSFER OF SITES IN PODSMEAD TO ENABLE THE REGENERATION OF THE ESTATE

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy that sought approval of a draft heads of terms for the disposal of sites in Podsmead to Gloucester City Homes (GCH) and to progress the delivery of estate regeneration.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources highlighted the principal features of the report including that the proposed disposal would be at an undervalue. She further advised that completion of the regeneration scheme would achieve one of the Council's key objectives.

The Cabinet Member for Environment informed Members that he was pleased to see progress in this area after many years and that he believed residents would see huge benefits in that ward. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods welcomed the proposals for the regeneration of Podsmead to revitalise and renew opportunity and pride in the area but expressed frustration at the recent relative lack of progress in the regeneration of Matson. The Cabinet Member for Environment commented that money was a key factor and that he hoped the regeneration of Matson would follow in due course.

RESOLVED that delegated authority is given to the Head of Finances and Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Performance & Resources and Planning & Housing Strategy, the Head of Communities and the Head of Place to:

- (1) conclude and agree heads of terms with Gloucester City Homes (GCH) for the disposal of the freehold interest in the areas of sites shown edged Red on the Plan ("the sites") whether by one or more transactions, and that a cost benefit analysis informs the final decision on disposal;
- (2) take all necessary steps and undertake necessary procedures, including entering into any legal arrangements or other documentation as may be required to implement or facilitate estate regeneration in line with those heads of terms (save for regulator matters).

Time of commencement: 6.00 pm
Time of conclusion: 6.40 pm

Chair