



CABINET

MEETING : Wednesday, 7th February 2024

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

Others in Attendance

Cllrs Hilton, Pullen, D. Brown, J. Brown, Conder, Field and Wilson
Managing Director
Director of Communities
Monitoring Officer
Head of Finance and Resources
Head of Place
Head of Transformation and Commissioning
Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : None.

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

77. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th January 2024 are confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

78. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

In respect of question 1 the member of the public enquired whether live railway information would be restored to the large screen. The Cabinet Member for Environment invited the Managing Director to respond. The Managing Director advised that the screen was owned by Gloucester Business Improvement District (BID) and that conversations were ongoing with them including over displaying railway information.

In respect of question 2 the member of the public sought clarification over when the contract for running the café would be marketed and which officer to contact about it. The Cabinet Member for Environment assured him that the details of the relevant officer would be supplied and the marketing would begin almost

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immediately. He however cautioned that in his experience such processes often take some months to complete.

In respect of question 3 the member of the public noted that although the County Council was responsible for the Bus Service Improvement Plan, the City Council owned the Transport Hub. He asked what consultation was being undertaken with bus passengers. The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that the question would be better addressed to the County Council as they have the responsibility, but he confirmed that he would attend any meetings to be set up.

79. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

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

In respect of question 1 Councillor Pullen gave examples of inappropriate advice given by the City Council to residents that he had been informed of. He sought reassurance that residents who telephone the Council will be given the correct advice to resolve their issues. The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that when installing the completely new system some teething difficulties had been discovered which were being taken forward. He invited the Head of Transformation and Commissioning to give more detail. The Head of Transformation and Commissioning confirmed that additional training sessions were taking place, and a revised letter was being sent to residents to meet the challenge of getting a consistent message across. He stated that all feedback to support the process was welcome.

In respect of question 2 Councillor Hilton noted that the Transport Hub had opened in October 2018 and asked what lessons had been learned during such a long process to get the window installed. The Cabinet Member for Environment stated that the COVID 19 pandemic had caused the most significant delay although time had been taken up by the manufacturers. He advised that now only the final installation agreement between the manufacturers and Stagecoach was outstanding.

In respect of question 3 Councillor Hilton referred to the £1.86m Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from central government in the 2016/17 Budget (Council 25th February 2016 Minute 66) and contrasted this with the £0.273m RSG for 2023/24 (Agenda Item 8 11.2). He enquired whether the Leader of the Council was disappointed with government. The Leader of the Council commented that it was always disappointing to have less money and that it was the situation across the whole local government sector.

In respect of question 4 Councillor Hilton asked whether more engagement with the owner of Spread Eagle Court would be considered to prevent the building decaying beside the soon to be completed Forum and Whitefriars development. The Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed that officers had made numerous attempts to contact the owner who appeared to be not prepared to engage.

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In respect of question 5 Councillor Hilton noted that the 15,582 square feet of vacant units represented a substantial loss of potential income. He enquired whether process of finding new tenants could be speeded up. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised that officers were working with external agents. She further commented that one successful let would act as a catalyst for others to follow and that the new University of Gloucestershire campus in the former Debenhams building would assist the process.

In respect of question 6 Councillor Hilton reminded Members that the New Homes Bonus had been £3.823m in 2016/17 (Council 25th February 2016 Minute 66). He queried whether the New Homes Bonus scheme should have been discontinued. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that the scheme was for new homes but reassured Members that the incentive to build new homes in Gloucester remained.

In respect of questions 8 and 9 Councillor Wilson apprised Members that residents of Orchard Park had told him they had not known about the withdrawal of the green bin service. He enquired how they had been engaged before the change and why they had not been informed earlier. The Cabinet Member for Environment stated that he believed residents were aware of the access problem in advance. He apologised for any confusion to residents who had tried to renew the service before the decision was taken by UBICO Ltd on the 1st February after an investigation into the matter.

In respect of question 10 Councillor Wilson informed Members that he had spent some time assisting residents to pay for their green bin service by telephone. He queried the need for them to provide all their details when these were held on file for other uses such as council tax. The Cabinet Member for Environment invited the Head of Transformation and Commissioning to respond. The Head of Transformation and Commissioning made clear the complexity behind the scenes of integrating statutory and non-statutory systems.

In respect of question 12 Councillor D. Brown advised Members of his own difficulty in finding a city centre parking space in the morning. He sought clarification of when the Longsmith Street car park will reopen. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that she was unable to provide a date as work was still needed. She further advised that the Parking Team were monitoring the utilisation of spaces in the city centre and reported that spare capacity remained in other car parks. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources commented that the closure of Longsmith Street car park had given an opportunity to actively promote the other car parks to residents.

In respect of question 14 Councillor D. Brown noted that although representing a very small proportion of residents, the number of responses had risen by 50% from last year's budget consultation. He asked what had been done differently to achieve this. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised that although this was the highest number of responses since for some time, a low response rate was common across all local authorities. She urged that all ward councillors encourage residents to participate in this and other consultations open on the Council website.

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In respect of question 16 Councillor J. Brown sought clarification of circumstances in which the flyposting rules would not be enforced. The Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed that action would only be taken if the sign owner failed to remove the offending material. He advised that he expected the rules to be enforced at every opportunity, as he did with those for dog fouling.

81. CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Environment that sought Members to recommend the adoption of a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Environment summarised the report. He detailed the key findings and actions (4.1-12), and drew Members' attention to the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Addendum) and stated that he was happy to support them as recommendations to Council. The Cabinet Member for Environment thanked the consultants WSP, officers and Members for their effort.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy advised that registered housing providers were already working hard to retrofit homes across the City for greater energy conservation. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods reminded Members of the good work done by the Gloucestershire Warm and Well advice line and the importance of making everyone aware of its availability. He emphasised that it was crucial for residents to both understand climate change and be empowered to take action. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure advised that within his portfolio measures were continually being sought to make the, mostly old, buildings more energy efficient. The Cabinet Member for Environment commented that the proposed Climate Change Action Plan would allow the Council to focus on areas where action can be taken quickly.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the Gloucester City Council Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan at Appendix 1 of the report be adopted and issued for public and key stakeholder consultation.

82. MONEY PLAN 2024-29 & FINAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2024/29

Cabinet considered the report of the Leader of the Council, and the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that sought Members to review the Council's Money Plan for the period 2024 to 2029 and Budget Proposals for 2024 to 2025 for recommendation to Council.

The Leader of the Council outlined the key features of the report proposing what he believed to be a sustainable money plan and budget. He drew Members' attention to the public consultation (Appendix 7) and the findings of the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer) on the robustness of the estimates and adequacy of the financial reserves (3.2).

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The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources placed the proposals in the context of high inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, and reassured Members that the plan represented the best estimates going forward in what are challenging times for local government. She highlighted the details of Local Government Finance Settlement (5.6) and advised Members that since the initial settlement announced in December, a further £41,000 has been provided, primarily from the funding guarantee and service grant. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources directed Members to the Money Plan (Appendix 1) and in particular the intended return of the General Fund balance to 10% of the revenue budget by 2028/29 and the importance of protecting the Business Rates Reserve fund to limit the impact of the expected business rate reset in 2026/27. She summarised the key budget pressures (appendix 2). The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources further drew Members' attention to the budget savings for the coming year (Appendix 3) and highlighted some of the savings in her own portfolio including £85,000 from the relocation of Customer Services and £25,000 from in-sourcing parking enforcement. On behalf of Cabinet she thanked all staff who assisted in the creation of the proposed budget expressing particular gratitude to the Head of Finance and Resources for his excellent support to Members.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy stressed the significance of the wider challenges, such as the cost-of-living crisis, not least for her own portfolio and the importance of making savings whilst protecting the most vulnerable residents. She reiterated the thanks for the Finance Team. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure expressed confidence in the Head of Finance and Resources and added his own thanks to all officers and the Senior Management Team for preparing what was a balanced budget. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods informed Members that he believed that the report proposed a good and responsive budget for communities.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:

- (1) the proposals for the 2024/25 budget included in this report be approved;
- (2) it be noted that consultation has been undertaken on budget proposals.

83. SUSPENSION OF 'PURCHASE IN RESERVE' GRAVE SPACES

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that proposed that the ability to purchase in reserve grave spaces be suspended in view of limited space while plots already purchased will continue to be available for use.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources reminded Members of the importance of making provision for residents of all faiths and beliefs. She outlined the background to the proposed short-term suspension (3.1-4), and the risks of not doing so (4.1). The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised that additional burial land was expected to have been secured by December 2025.

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure commented that the proposal was the most pragmatic way forward. The Cabinet Member for Environment stated that it

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was a common-sense solution as not suspending the facility would result in increased costs for residents.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) Gloucester City Council implement a suspension on the ability to purchase in reserve graves until an additional site for burial land is available;
- (2) authority is delegated to Head of Finance and Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources to remove the suspension once additional burial land has been secured.

84. LEASE OF LAND AT HEMPSTED MEADOW

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, and the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure that outlined options for the disposal of land at Hempsted Meadow by way of a lease for the provision of a dedicated event space to include a car boot sale, markets and associated amenities.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised Members that the car boot sale licence they had previously authorised (Cabinet 8th February 2023 Minute 79) had produced a consistent income for the pilot period (3.6). She stated that granting a lease on robust commercial terms would continue generate income for the Council in the same way. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure commented that the Meadow site remained a fantastic resource despite its fragility due to flooding and that the time was right to formalise the lease to ensure the continuation of the car boot sales. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy reminded Members of the great interest from residents in the car boot sales. She expressed confidence that residents would support the proposals.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) authority is given to the Investment Manager in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Policy & Resources and Culture & Leisure to undertake a competitive process to enter into a lease for a term of up to 15 years with 5 year breaks for the area identified at Appendix 1 of the report;
- (2) the site conditions are evaluated and recommendations made so that the site can operate all year round;
- (3) the existing operator is given a 9-month extension to their existing licence to enable the car boot sale to stay operational while the competitive process offering a lease of the area identified is undertaken.

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85. CULTURAL STRATEGY UPDATE

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure that provided an overview of progress made against the Cultural Strategy for the year January to December 2023.

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure summarised the report and the successes of 2023 including the award of Arts Council England National Portfolio status to three organisations in the City (3.4) and the stability that brings. He reminded Members of the clear high social value generated by culture and noted that although 2023 had been busy for cultural activities in Gloucester, 2024 was expected to be busier. The Cabinet Member for Environment informed Members that he believed the large amounts of money being invested in the City from outside spoke volumes about Gloucester and its future. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods highlighted the inclusiveness and flexibility of the Cultural Strategy. He hoped that it would generate even more investment not just in the centre but in all wards across the City. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods recommended that a similar equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategy be developed to remove barriers to inclusion for all residents. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy commented that it was great to see such a balance between people coming into the City with investment and their expertise, such as with the Hundred Heroines project, and residents setting up and running their own activities.

RESOLVED that the report is accepted and progress against the objectives and actions noted.

Time of commencement: 6.00 pm

Time of conclusion: 6.55 pm

Chair