



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING** : Monday, 22nd January 2024

**PRESENT** : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Pullen (Vice-Chair), Durdey (Spokesperson), Ackroyd, Campbell, Castle, Dee, Evans, Hilton, Hudson, Hyman, O'Donnell, Sawyer, Wilson and Morgan

### **Others in Attendance**

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

Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman

Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods, Councillor Raymond Padilla

Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Andrew Lewis

Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor Stephanie Chambers

Head of Finance & Resources

Financial Services Manager

Democratic & Electoral Services Officer

**APOLOGIES** : Cllrs. Kubaszczyk and Zaman

### **82. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **83. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING**

There were no declarations of party whipping.

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

There were no public questions.

### **85. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)**

There were no petitions nor deputations.

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**86. MONEY PLAN 2024-29 AND BUDGET PROPOSALS 2024-25**

- 86.1 The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Cook, introduced the report, and explained that Members were being asked to review the Council's Money Plan for recommendation to Council and that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were being asked to consider the information contained in the report and make any recommendations to Cabinet. He highlighted the fact that in accordance with section 25 of the Local Government Act (2003), the S151 officer was required to report on the robustness of the estimates of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. Councillor Cook outlined the main objectives of the Money Plan, which were included at 4.2 in the report.
- 86.2 The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman, noted that there was a tough economic climate nationally, with high inflation and cost of living pressures. She referred to 5.6 in the report (Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25) which highlighted that there would be:
- An increase in the Revenue Support Grant of 6.62% which equated to an additional £17,000.
  - A reduction in the Services Grant of £125,000, and;
  - A new homes bonus grant of £811,000.
- 86.3 Councillor Norman stated that the opening position of 2024/25 showed a general fund balance of £500,000 with the General Fund returning to around 10% of the general budget by 2028/29. She stated that 2026/27 saw a drawdown from the Business Rate Reserve due to an expected business rate reset. Councillor Norman referred Members to Appendix 2 of the report which detailed the Budget Pressures and Efficiencies over the duration of the Money Plan and advised that homelessness prevention alongside inflation were two key pressures. She said in relation to income generation, the direct cremations that the Crematorium would offer, alongside the Food Docks opening would be two key drivers of income.
- 86.4 In relation to Appendix 3 (Budget Savings Programmes - 2024/25 & 2025/26) Councillor Norman informed Members that in her portfolio an estimated saving of £85,000 would be made owing to the relocation of staff from the Gateway to the office in Eastgate Shopping Centre. Further, the insourcing of parking enforcement was forecasted to save £25,000. She concluded by thanking all Cabinet members, and Officers who had assisted with the preparation of the Money Plan, particularly the Head of Finance & Resources.
- 86.5 The Chair thanked the Head of Finance & Resources for a clear and accessible report. He raised concerns in relation to the amount the Council were borrowing, particularly in relation to the Forum, and asked how confident the Council was that they were not overborrowing and would be financially secure. The Head of Finance & Resources stated that there would

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be a gap until the Forum development was completed as it could not generate income until then. He stated that although interest rates had unfortunately increased, the advice from Treasury advisors was that interest rates would come down.

- 86.6 The Chair referred to the Budget Pressures outlined in Appendix 2 and the expectation that interest costs would increase to £555,000 for 24/25. He asked whether the reason the interest figures were not included for 25/26 was because the Head of Finance & Resources was not yet aware of what the interest figures were likely to be for that year. In response, the Head of Finance & Resources noted that it was expected that interest rates would stabilise in 2025/26 and that they had included expected interest rate fall for 2026/27.
- 86.7 The Chair referred to the narrative at 5.7 stating that the New Homes Bonus was expected to reduce from £0.811 million in 2024/25 to £0 in 2025/26 and asked what the reason for this was. In response, the Head of Finance & Resources noted that the New Homes Bonus was a legacy grant and that the assumption was that the Council would not continue to receive it.
- 86.8 In response to a question from Councillor Wilson as to whether the Council were spending too much of the earmarked reserves, the Head of Finance & Resources replied that the Money Plan intended to capture when it was anticipated that the Council would use the earmarked reserves and the specific purpose they were allocated for.
- 86.9 Councillor Wilson noted that there would be an increase of around 3% for Council Tax and asked if that was the maximum permitted. In response, the S151 officer stated that district councils were restricted to a 2.99% (or a £5) increase.
- 86.10 In response to a question by Councillor Durdey regarding the 5% pay award, the Head of Finance & Resources stated that the 5% figure was an estimate based on all information they had.
- 86.11 Councillor Durdey asked what assumptions had been made in relation to inflation. In response, the S151 officer responded that the table in paragraph 7.2 of the Council report listed the major assumptions that had been made.
- 86.12 Councillor Hilton asked whether the Head of Finance & Resources had any proposals to reduce the predicted overspend in the proceeding months. In response the Head of Finance & Resources stated that there were plans to bring down the expected overspend. Councillor Norman further added that as soon as the overspend was highlighted, the Cabinet and Senior Officers came up with plans to reduce the predicted overspend. She emphasised that there were some events which were out of everyone's control, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the Cabinet planned to bring forward a temporary accommodation programme to alleviate some of the pressures of the increased demand against supply for temporary accommodation.

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- 86.13 Councillor Hilton referred to the Earmarked Reserves at 14.4 and noted that the County Council included a narrative about what the earmarked reserves were proposed to be used for. He asked whether an additional narrative could be included for the earmarked reserves and whether there was a need to keep reserves for funds listed at £0. In response, the Head of Finance & Resources stated that they could add a narrative for what the earmarked reserves would be used for and that he would update the table to remove reserves for categories listed at £0.
- 86.14 In relation to the 2024-25 Fees and Charges at Appendix 6, Councillor Hilton observed that the Cabinet had increased car parking fees but that the report did not include the figure of increases for 2024/25. He asked whether certain charges were being increased by an unreasonable amount. In response, the Head of Finance & Resources, confirmed that the percentage increase would be added to the front of the report for the 2024/25 Fees and Charges and that the proposed increases had been based on inflation figures for the current financial year.
- 86.15 Councillor Wilson asked for further information regarding the estimated £190,000 savings from Ubico. Councillor Cook stated that Ubico had found efficiencies by not replacing staff members who had left their role which had in turn reduced the wage bill. He further advised that Ubico were increasing the number of bulky waste collections and that out-of-hours street cleaning would not continue, which would also result in savings.
- 86.16 In response to a further question from Councillor Wilson regarding the proposed £375,000 savings in 2025/26 for 'new technology', Councillor Norman stated that the Head of Transformation and Commissioning had been looking into budget efficiencies and whilst this process was in its infancy as he was relatively new to the role, it had been indicated that budget savings using technology could be made. She anticipated that there would be Cabinet reports with more detail around this in due course.
- 86.17 Councillor Durdey asked what savings were being made in regard to parking. In response, the Head of Finance & Resources stated that all savings in relation to parking were included on page 74 of the report and an estimated £25,000 would be saved by bringing parking enforcement in house.
- 86.18 Councillor Sawyer referred to the Capital Programme at Appendix 4 and the narrative in relation to improvements that would be made at GL1/Oxstalls. She asked for more detail about what the £8m investment would include. In response, the Head of Finance & Resources advised that the Head of Culture had commissioned a review of the buildings and what needed to be done with those assets.
- 86.19 In response to an additional question from Councillor Sawyer regarding the increased spending on GCC building improvements, the Head of Finance

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and Resources advised that this increase was largely for Brownfield remuneration works at St Oswalds.

86.20 Councillor Pullen asked whether the vacant positions at Ubico had been deleted or whether there was a process to replace them. Councillor Cook confirmed that the posts had not been deleted and no redundancies had been made, however Ubico had taken the decision not to replace persons who had left.

**Leader and Environment Portfolio**

86.21 Councillor Cook stated that there were 31.1 Full Time Employees (FTEs) in post with 1.0 vacancies. He said that the Council were continuing to face a tough inflationary environment which had led to financial pressures resulting from increased costs and stringent Local Government Financial Settlements. Councillor Cook highlighted that Ubico had found efficiency in service delivery and had therefore not needed to fill some vacant posts. He added that there was also a removal of additional out of hours Street Cleaning and an increase in Bulky waste service.

86.22 Councillor Cook asserted that the Council remained committed to tackling the climate crisis and achieving its net zero carbon targets. He stated that the Council would implement charging for replacement wheelie bins, which was expected to generate an annual income of £55,000, noting that this policy had been agreed in 2017 but had not been implemented.

86.23 Councillor Cook added that the Council would look to identify creative ways to finance the various projects that would need to come forward if and when the Council adopted the new Climate Change Action Plan. By way of example, he stated that he would bring forward a report to Cabinet in March proposing to increase the number of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points in Council-owned car parks. Councillor Cook advised that all income streams within his portfolio continued to at least meet targets. He concluded by stating that the main priorities for his portfolio was to ensure that the City of Gloucester continued its positive regeneration, that they appropriately managed the City environment whilst actively taking steps to address climate change and the finances of the Council were managed to ensure it remained financially solvent in the uncertain climate.

86.24 The Chair asked whether the income generated from recycling remained relatively consistent. In response, Councillor Cook stated that it could fluctuate.

86.25 The Chair stated that it was his understanding that cardboard was the most valuable recyclable, and that, in extreme weather, wet cardboard could not be used. He asked whether the poor weather conditions had affected this income stream. In response, Councillor Cook stated that metal (particularly aluminium) was the most valuable asset in terms of recyclables. He advised that the Council could recycle damp cardboard.

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- 86.26 Councillor Pullen asked how much of an increase in income the Council anticipated by increasing bulky waste collections. In response, Councillor Cook stated that it was expected to increase by around 30%-40%. The S151 officer said that he believed that this would generate in the region of £15,000.
- 86.27 Councillor Pullen asked how the Council would impose the charge for replacement wheelie bins, particularly in situations where there may be mitigating circumstances. In response, Councillor Cook explained that each case would be evaluated on its individual merit and that the policy had been agreed in 2017.
- 86.28 Councillor Hilton questioned the decision to remove out of hours cleaning services, noting that out of hours periods were often when Gloucester struggled with litter the most. He asked what Councillor Cook meant by out of hours and asked if that included bank holidays. He further highlighted that wheelie bins sometimes broke and that he felt that it was unfair to charge residents if it was not their fault. Councillor Hilton asked whether the Council would be selling the bins at market value or above it to make a profit, and for assurance that residents would not be charged for ancillary bin replacements. Councillor Cook replied that there was no plan to charge residents for other replacement bins, that the fee was an admin and delivery fee. He also advised that residents could opt to replace a 240 litre bin with a 140 litre for free and that if residents chose this option, it would reduce their waste which would be positive for the environment.

**Performance and Resources Portfolio**

- 86.29 Councillor Norman stated that her portfolio had 120.6 FTE in post with 12.0 FTE vacancies (Total FTE: 132.6). She further added that this figure included 8 apprentices. She said that her portfolio included the following pressures:
- Costs of the upcoming 2024 Local elections (£70,000).
  - Increase in interest costs and minimum revenue provisions of £1.055 Million as a result of the interest rate increases during 2023-24 and the ongoing investment in the regeneration of the city centre.
  - The Public Sector Audit Appointments organisation had informed the Council that the external audit fees were increasing by £112,000 in response to the public sector audit challenges being faced nationally.
- 86.30 Councillor Norman stated that the relocation of the customer services team to office space owned by the Council within the Eastgate Centre from its current location at the Gateway was expected to generate savings of £85,000, and that other savings were expected on the conclusion of a review of the car parking provisions, including considerations around bringing the enforcement team in-house. These were expected to generate total savings of £25,000. She stated that The Food Dock regeneration on Commercial Road was completed in the final quarter of 2023 and that the Council's interest in the development would lead to an increased income stream

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estimated at £100,000 per annum. Councillor Norman advised that the crematorium had recently introduced a direct cremation facility that was expected to generate £50,000 of additional income, and that the Council had also been informed that the current funding position of the LGPS pension scheme would lead to expected future savings of £482,000.

86.31 Councillor Norman stated that she did not anticipate any changes to her portfolio.

86.32 The Chair noted that £70,000 had been allocated for elections, he asked if this was earmarked for local elections or whether it covered a general election. In response, the Deputy Leader stated that this was purely for local elections.

86.33 Councillor Pullen noted that the Council already owned the Gateway and asked how relocating customer service staff from there to the Eastgate Office would save £85,000. Councillor Norman responded that the savings would be derived from the reduction of operating costs.

86.34 Councillor Pullen asked if the Council planned to sell the Gateway. In response, the Deputy Leader stated that there was a Cabinet report in December that addressed this issue. She said various options had been considered, but that selling the Gateway seemed to be the most preferable. She stated that the relocation from the Gateway to Eastgate would take a few months as there was currently a contractor based in the Eastgate office space.

86.35 Councillor Pullen asked what would happen to the Gateway if they could not sell it and noted that it would still cost money to have the Gateway even if it was not being used. Councillor Norman stated that there would be some costs to owning the building, even if it was not being used. However, it was felt that the move would be good for all parties. She added that the market intelligence that the Council had received suggested that the building would be sold if it was placed on the market.

86.36 Councillor Wilson asked for clarification on what the minimum revenue service provision was. In response, the Head of Finance & Resources stated that it was a statutory requirement to put money aside from revenue budget to meet the costs of capital borrowing.

**Culture and Leisure Portfolio**

86.37 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Lewis, stated that his portfolio had 43.3 FTE in post with 3.3 FTE vacancies (total 46.6), noting that zero hours workers were also hired when required. He said that during 2023-24, the Culture & Leisure team continued to be successful in their grant applications. Councillor Lewis advised that the works at the Museum to utilise the Museum Estate and Development Fund grant funding that was confirmed towards the end of 2022-23 were in progress. He said that the Culture team had continued to monitor and apply for the various Arts Sector

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funding sources that were available and this had led to further successful Heritage Lottery and Arts Council England grant applications to assist with the funding of various archaeological and archiving work respectively. He said that the Guildhall team had continued to develop and expand their programme following the successful application for Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation funding for the 3 years from 2023-26. This along with the grant funded venue development in 2022-23 had seen positive trends in the income generation from the programmed activities.

- 86.38 Councillor Lewis advised that the Tall Ships Festival was due to return in 2024 and was currently in the late planning stages. In terms of leisure provision, he noted that the 2023-24 financial year had been dominated by the cost of living pressures arising from the high cost of energy, and this had caused Aspire Sports Cultural & Leisure Trust to enter administration. He said that the Council had rapidly engaged an interim contract with Freedom Leisure to operate the various leisure facilities within a capped budget of £30,000 per month. He said that consultants had been engaged to continue the longer-term contract procurement at a budgeted cost of £50,000.
- 86.39 Councillor Lewis stated that there were no new proposed budget savings in his portfolio for 2024-25. He said that The Culture team would continue to identify and implement ways of increasing the profitability of the commercial activities of the Council to support their cultural ambitions and the Council's budgets. Councillor Lewis further explained that the Council were still awaiting the outcome of an application that had been made to the Sports England capital grant fund for funding to put towards improving the energy efficiency of the GL1 leisure centre.
- 86.40 Councillor Lewis advised that there had not been any change in priorities in his portfolio as a result of the Draft Money Plan.
- 86.41 Councillor Lewis stated that the Council's vision to put Culture at the heart of Gloucester, which was agreed at the time they adopted the Cultural Strategy, remained. He stated that the priorities within his portfolio were to:
- Continue to grow the programme, the presence and audiences for Gloucester Guildhall and build on its first successful year as an Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) and deliver the Guildhall Business Plan.
  - Grow back audiences for the Guildhall Cinema with a new model of programming in partnership with the Independent Cinema Office.
  - Complete the delivery of the MEND capital investment project at the Museum of Gloucester.
  - Continue to deliver the Museums Development Plan – including the vital work on collections care and removal of collections from the Folk of Gloucester and explore opportunities for storage solutions and seek additional funding opportunities.
  - Continue to grow the successful business and programme at Blackfriars Priory



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- Deliver a great festivals and events calendar including the Tall Ships Festival, with funding and Officer support from the city council, as well an effective and collaborative network of events organisers enhanced by Guildhall Presents events taking place around the city.
- Work in partnership with Gloucester Culture Trust in the submission of funding bids to support activity in Kings Square and more widely across the city.
- Use the assets of Visit Gloucester to promote the city and attract visitors to Gloucester as well as to inform residents of activity on their doorstep.
- Secure a long-term contract to manage the Council's leisure facilities and support the council's Sport and Physical Activity strategy 2023 – 2028.

86.42 The Chair noted that there was still £305,000 earmarked for Museum Bequest and asked for more detail on this. In response, the Cabinet Member for Leisure stated that these reserves were for the specific purpose of doing work on artefacts. He said that it had not been necessary to use it as they had received other grants which allowed them to carry out this work.

86.43 In response to a question from Councillor Wilson, the Cabinet Member for Leisure stated that he believed that the budget for Culture and Leisure when adjusted for inflation was similar to the previous year.

86.44 The Chair noted that there was a discussion at one point in regard to potentially purchasing the building next to the Guildhall to increase their space, he asked whether this was still planned. In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure stated that this was discussed but it was decided that this would be unpractical and would not have represented value for money.

86.45 The Chair stated that the Guildhall put on excellent events but that it could not host larger concerts or events, owing to its size. He asked whether there were plans to make use of a venue in Gloucester that could hold larger concerts. In response, the Cabinet Member stated that there was no immediate plan for this, however, GL1 were working with the Guildhall in making changes to the main hall, which could theoretically be used for events in the future. He said that when music events were held there previously, there were issues, particularly with acoustics. This would need to be solved before any event took place, but that was not an impossibility that Gloucester would hold such events in the future.

**Communities and Neighbourhoods Portfolio**

86.46 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbours, Councillor Padilla, confirmed that the current staffing levels were 21.6 FTE in post with 1.3 FTE vacancies (Total 22.9).

86.47 Councillor Padilla advised that during 2023-24, the Community Wellbeing team had continued to manage numerous grants received from the Government directly, or via the County Council and other partners. He stated

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that the Council received several grant income streams through the County Council, the Integrated Locality Partnership and the OPCC to deliver specific community support projects over the two years from 2023-25. These grants had enabled partnership working with local charitable agencies and support additional staff to be employed to support projects covering food equality, youth engagement, and serious youth violence prevention. Of the FTE, nine roles were currently funded from these grants providing the Council with the ability to ensure the continuation of the positive aspects of these services is achievable within the Council's finances. He said that Officers would continue to monitor requirements and explore affordable responses as the Council moved into 2024-25; alongside developing plans for the delivery of current Council and grant priorities such as providing warm spaces and addressing knife crime concerns within the constraints of the staff and financial resources available to do so.

86.48 Councillor Padilla stated that there were no specific savings targets within his portfolio for 2024-25, and that the Council would continue to work with the County Council, the Integrated Locality Partnership and the OPCC to deliver specific community support projects based on grants received from these bodies. He outlined the following main priorities for his portfolio:

- Continue to support asset-based approaches and community building.
- Develop further the work of Nightsafe and Daysafe.
- Continue to support Solace (Anti-Social Behaviour Partnership).
- Deliver on Council motions such as Knife Crime, Warm Spaces, City of Sanctuary
- Continue the food equality work through the Nourishing Gloucester partnership

86.49 The Chair asked Councillor Padilla if defibrillators were part of his portfolio and asked for more clarity on the £6,000 earmarked reserves for defibrillators. In response, Councillor Padilla confirmed that defibrillators were a part of his portfolio. He added that some defibrillators had been installed without the requirement for Council funding and that Community groups could request them.

86.50 The Chair asked how many defibrillators had been installed in Gloucester. In response, the Cabinet Member stated that he would make enquiries with the relevant Officers and that an answer would be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course.

86.51 Councillor Pullen asked if the Council directly funded Asset Based Community Groups (ABCD). In response the Cabinet Member for Neighbours and Communities stated that they did not directly fund ABCD groups directly but helped them to get started. The Head of Finance & Resources added that his understanding was that in regard to the CIC, the Council had provided some start-up funds. However, the intention was always for them to be self-funding once they were established.

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**Planning and Housing Strategy Portfolio**

86.52 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor S. Chambers confirmed that there were 49 FTE in post with 7.6 FTE vacancies (Total 56.6)

86.53 She explained that the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the high inflation rates over the past year had led to a significant increase in the demand for temporary accommodation. The increased demand had exceeded the accommodation that the Council had available to it and the overall annual budget for 2023-24 had therefore been exceeded. Councillor S. Chambers said that actions were being taken by Council Officers to alleviate the financial burden on the Council but in a way which still supported the needs of residents. This included the purchase of several properties to use for temporary accommodation purposes. She said that the statutory nature of many of the fees that could be charged by the planning service created consequential financial pressures when prices and salaries were rising at a faster rate. Councillor S. Chambers noted that Government had recently reviewed these charges and on 6th December 2023 enacted legislative amendments to increase planning application fees. The key changes of note being:

- An increase in planning application fees by 25% across the board, which will rise to 35% for major schemes.
- The provision for a 'free go' on application resubmissions will be removed.
- An annual rise in application fees linked to inflation (capped at 10% every April from 2025 onwards).

86.54 Councillor S. Chambers stated that the level and nature of planning applications received drove the extent of the work and the costs of the staff input required, noting that a forecast for planning income (applications, PPAs and pre-apps) was currently being finalised. She stated that Members needed to be mindful that the Council were not in control of the timing of planning submissions and therefore, this figure would be kept under continual review. Councillor S. Chambers noted that the Council intended to increase the pre-application and other discretionary planning related fees in line with the increases introduced by the Government to ensure the cost of providing these services would be covered by the fees paid by the beneficiary of the service. She said that an additional pressure of £30,000 had arisen within the Building Control shared service, which would be undertaking a review of its provision during 2024-25.

86.55 Councillor S. Chambers stated that there were no further savings being proposed in either the planning or the housing services. She stated that the Council would continue to bid for the various Government funding that was available and during the year it had received various grants that will deliver

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additional housing services for those in need. She stated that she was pleased to note that the Council had secured £100,000 of grant funding from government to enhance skills and knowledge across the place service, and this grant would start to be spent in 2024/25.

86.56 Councillor S. Chambers stated that there were no new income streams identified for her portfolio for the coming year. However, as noted previously, the ability to annually increase statutory planning fees in line with inflation has now been granted by the Government.

86.57 Councillor S. Chambers stated that her main priorities for 2024-25 would be:

- Pursuing a homes acquisition strategy to provide homes for those in need and reducing the financial cost of providing this vital service to the council
- Progressing the Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Joint Plan
- Assessment of major planning applications including:
  - Costco
  - Podsmead regeneration sites
  - St Oswald Housing Development
- Responding to international resettlement and addressing the local impacts through partnership working
- Facilitating the delivery of MoD homes for Afghan resettlement and supporting the integration of families
- Working in partnership with county colleagues to support the delivery of integration support for new refugees as they leave Home Office accommodation in Gloucester.
- Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP) project: improving housing standards and auditing rent costs associated with supported housing schemes
- Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO) project: Securing affordable private rented accommodation for ex-offenders who are at risk of sleeping rough on leaving prison.
- Trajectories Project: Identifying and promoting future housing development opportunities.
- Accessibility Project: Increasing the provision of and promoting better design of accessible housing.
- Larger Homes Project: Finding solutions for households with a need for a larger home (5+ bedrooms).
- Pathways Project: Engaging with new housing providers to increase capacity of move-on accommodation within the homelessness pathway
- Private Sector Engagement Project: Securing private rented sector accommodation options for vulnerable residents
- Empty Homes Project: Working with empty home owners to bring homes back into use to support housing need.
- Reducing reliance on temporary accommodation, particularly B&Bs and thus reducing expenditure.
- Work in partnership to reduce rough sleeping using Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding.

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- New housing supply (in partnership with RPs and VCS) to reduce numbers of people in emergency temporary accommodation and increase capacity of move-on accommodation to support the homelessness pathway.
- Work in partnership with social care and health commissioners regarding the provision of specialist housing and related care to support Gloucester's housing needs.
- Creation of an in-house Home Improvement Agency to support residents requiring adaptations to live independently in their own homes.

86.58 The Chair referred to comments relating to the Podsmead regeneration scheme, and asked whether there would be a S106 for the Community Infrastructure Levy as part of the application. In response, Councillor S. Chambers stated that she was unsure at this point, and that the application would have to be judged when it came in.

86.59 Councillor Pullen noted that the Council had borrowed £5 million to acquire properties within the private sector. He asked how many properties the Council had bought and how confident were they that they would be able to purchase them quickly to get people housed and to make a budget saving in the longer term. The Head of Finance replied that it was his understanding that there were 6-7 properties that were being looked at currently and that one of them might be ready to be used by the end of March (2024).

86.60 Councillor Hilton asked how confident the Council was that they could stay in the new budget for housing and temporary accommodation. He noted that Members had challenged both MPs in the area (Gloucester and Tewkesbury) to help tackle the homelessness issue. He commented that the national cost of living crisis had led to a spike in homelessness cases and noted that this was putting the Council finances in a precarious position. Councillor Hilton further added that he was concerned that the Council's accounts from 2 years ago had not yet been audited. In response, The Head of Finance and Resources stated that Councillor Hilton was correct to highlight homelessness as an issue and that the requirement for temporary accommodation had become a national problem. He said that the budget included an extra £500,000 towards homelessness prevention. Councillor S. Chambers asserted that she was in frequent contact with the MP to work towards a solution to homelessness in Gloucester and advised that she would be in a meeting in London with him and persons from other local authorities to discuss solutions. She added that housing at every level needed to be looked at, including the addition of more affordable housing.

86.61 Councillor Dee asked if the Council had looked at the issue of long-standing empty homes. In response, Councillor S. Chambers stated that she had looked at this issue and that work had been undertaken with housing and council tax Officers to identify empty homes.

86.62 **RESOLVED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

## 87. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
22.01.24**

Monday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

**Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours**

**Time of conclusion: 8.05 pm hours**

**Chair**