

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 31 July 2019 in the Council Chamber, Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Robert Bird	Cllr Carole Allaway Martin
Cllr Kevin Cromwell	Cllr Brian Robinson
Cllr Kate Haigh	Cllr Rachel Smith
Cllr Joe Harris (Vice-chair)	Cllr Ray Theodoulou
Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Cllr Lesley Williams MBE
Cllr Stephen Hirst	

Apologies: Cllr Iain Dobie and Cllr Shaun Parsons

1. JANE BURNS

Cllr Joe Harris, the committee vice-chair, advised members that Jane Burns, Director of Strategy and Challenge and Monitoring Officer, would shortly be leaving the Council to join Cheshire East Council as Executive Director - Corporate Services. He noted that Jane had joined the Council in 2003 and he thanked her for the support that she had provided to members over that time. He said that Jane was always polite, courteous and helpful. Members gave Jane a round of applause in recognition of her service to the Council.

2. MINUTES

Members noted that at the full Council meeting on 26 June 2019 the Leader of the Council had indicated that it was a matter for the scrutiny committees themselves to determine the number of meetings they held each year. Committee members confirmed that they would wish to have six scheduled meetings each year (including the budget scrutiny meeting). Meetings could be cancelled if there was no business and additional meetings could be arranged if there was a need to look at a specific issue.

A request was made that gender neutral language should in future be used in minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2019 were then confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

4. ONE PUBLIC ESTATE

- 4.1 Neil Corbett, the Council's Head of Property Services, provided a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the One Public Estate (OPE) Programme in Gloucestershire. He explained that OPE was a national programme run by the Cabinet Office Government Property Unit with support from the Local Government Association (LGA). Senior officers from the County Council, District Councils, Health, Fire and Police sat on the One Gloucestershire Board to provide corporate oversight of the programme. Property officers from each organisation were on a joint working group responsible for the delivery of projects with support from the Cabinet Office and LGA representatives. Opportunities were also being pursued with a wider group of partners including the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Work and Pensions, Homes England and the Ministry of Defence.
- 4.2 The programme currently included four key projects: Gloucester and Cheltenham public sector hubs, Forest of Dean partner alignment and the Cotswold regeneration and blue light project. A range of other projects were being pursued across the county but these were not included in the Government supported scheme.
- 4.3 The local target for OPE over five years was 500 new homes, 1,000 new jobs, £30.6 million of capital receipts and £5.6 million of revenue savings from reducing the size of the estate.
- 4.4 Detailed information was provided on regeneration of the Quayside and Blackfriars project including new student accommodation, proposals for the Gloucester health hub and the refurbishment of Shire Hall. Information was also presented on the proposals relating to Cheltenham, Cirencester and the Forest of Dean.
- 4.5 The next phase of OPE funding would focus on housing delivery to allow more complex and schemes that had stalled to be progressed.
- 4.6 Members acknowledged the good work that was being undertaken, particularly the refurbishment of Shire Hall and regeneration of the surrounding area. They requested that the officers in Property Services who had been involved in the project be sent the thanks of the committee. Some concerns were expressed, however, around the suitability of the former Quayside site as a health hub incorporating two GP surgeries. They questioned the ease of access by public transport and the proposed car parking arrangements for patients visiting the surgeries.
- 4.7 Mr Corbett explained that the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had specified the requirements for the health hub which did not include free patient

car parking. Separately, a business case for a multi-storey car park on the Quayside site was being developed which would look to incorporate the highest environmental standards. The consultants undertaking the design had been asked to ensure that electric vehicle charging points were 'future proofed' so that they could be adapted to meet the latest technology.

- 4.8 Referring to staff travel, he noted that a new staff travel plan was being developed and this was expected to include greater use of pool vehicles that were hybrid or fully electric, encourage cycling and the use of public transport.
- 4.9 Whilst acknowledging the good work that had been undertaken, some members believed that more could be done to encourage economic development and provide new homes, particularly affordable and social housing. They felt that on occasions the Council should set aside the need for a capital receipt and focus more on the social value of particular projects.
- 4.10 Mr Corbett said that the County Council was working with partner organisations to facilitate opportunities for affordable housing but it was difficult at times because of the financial viability of some sites.
- 4.11 A member said that the Council was duty bound to achieve best value when disposing of property. This allowed the Council to reinvest funds in priority areas such as Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding. They noted that the District Councils were the primary authorities responsible for delivering housing across the county.
- 4.12 Answering questions, Mr Corbett explained that planned disposals were reported regularly at Cabinet meetings as an exempt item and the information was available to all members. He said that the information presented would shortly be expanded to include the value of completed sales. He noted that, although the financial target for sales had been missed in year 1 of the current programme, he was confident that the overall target would be met or exceeded by the end of the programme.
- 4.13 One member asked if the Council could pursue outstanding environmental standards. Referring to the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, Mr Corbett said that every effort was made to achieve BREEAM environmental standards during the construction of new buildings. He stated that new technologies were being looked at including the latest renewable energy generation and modular and off-site construction. Cycling facilities and electric vehicles along with tree planting were key elements in the design process in Gloucester and other locations. In terms of carbon usage, targets had been set and detailed monitoring was now taking place. A display would be installed in main reception at Shire Hall to

show levels of energy consumption. Information on energy consumption would be included in the quarterly performance report.

4.14 Cllr Harris thanked Mr Corbett for his detailed and informative presentation.

4.15 The committee requested that Cllr Lynden Stowe, Cabinet Member for Finance and Change, be invited to attend the next meeting to provide information on how the Council could harness more social benefits as part of its property disposal programme. This included working with partners, such as the District Councils and GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership, to provide more social housing and support the local economy. They would also like to understand the future priorities for the One Public Estate Programme.

4.16 A request was also made that a letter be sent to the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group to ask if free car parking could be provided for patients as part of the new health hub facilities at the Quayside site. A question was raised around the potential merger of the two surgeries that would be relocating to the site. Members were anxious that the facilities were designed with integration in mind from the outset.

5. INFORMATION ITEMS - COUNCIL BUDGET

5.1 A member expressed concern at the level of overspend on Children's Services so early in the financial year. They said that they would have expected a senior member of staff from the Finance Team to be present at the meeting. Simon Harper, Head of Democratic Services, explained that it was a single issue meeting to look at the One Public Estate Programme and that the finance reports had only been included for information at the request of members. He reassured members that finance reports were routinely presented to the committee.

5.2 Referring to recycling, another member was concerned at the reference to reducing recycling tonnages in paragraph 28 of the finance update report. Mr Harper undertook to speak to the relevant senior officer to provide more detailed information. The member regretted that their request for a scrutiny task group to assess the impact of the structure of the Javelin Park contract on levels of waste and recycling had been rejected.

CHAIR