

# CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 19 April 2023 at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

**PRESENT:**

Cllr Matt Babbage	Cllr Jeremy Hilton
Cllr John Bloxsom (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller
Cllr Ben Evans	Cllr Lisa Spivey
Cllr Andrew Gravells MBE	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Colin Hay	

Substitutes: Cllr Susan Williams

Virtual Attendance: Cllr Stephan Fifield

Apologies: Cllr Terry Hale and Cllr Vernon Smith

Cllr Bloxsom as Vice-Chair of the Committee Chaired the meeting

## **2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes from the meeting held on 28 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

## **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

## **4. UPDATE FROM THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE**

4.1 Members were reminded that the detailed Commissioning Intentions for the Council this financial year were set out in the papers for Budget Council in February (these can be accessed [here](#)).

4.2 Cllr Stowe gave a summary update of each priority within Corporate Resources for the next 12 months:

- Improving customer experience, ensuring contact into the Council was resulting in a solution or answer, rather than just signposting on. This would include benchmarking the current approach against other county councils, setting some common standards, developing consistent process, and providing training to staff. One of the key areas here would be the reporting of highway defects.
- The programme used for Enterprise Resource Planning (the integrated finance, HR, and payment system) was in need of an urgent update,

which would include the incorporation of procurement and would ensure a more efficient, joined up internal process.

- Power BI was due to be rolled out across the council. This was a tool used to provide much more powerful and insightful analysis and presentation of service data in areas such as Adult Social Care, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service etc.
- Although Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was in the Leader's portfolio, it was a key priority across the Council. A self-assessment had recently been completed against the Local Government Association framework, off the back of which officers were currently working to bring forward new equality objectives and an action plan to deliver these. A learning and development programme was currently being rolled out to manager to enable them to develop more inclusive teams and services.
- Legal Services transformation was making good progress via its 'grow our own' programme, of which the first cohort of employees would be ready to hold their own caseload by the end of September, and the rollout of a new case management system which would be implemented within the next 6 months.
- Work continued on work force recruitment and retention issues. The Council was aware of the level of competition it faced within its peer group, it needed to make sure it was capable of retraining good staff, but also being successful in recruitment when vacancies arose. Development programmes were in place for key areas which remained a challenge nationally such as social care. The current budget also allocated sufficient funding to continue the offering of apprenticeship schemes across departments.
- Improvements to enable agile working continued, whilst also understanding how to maximise the use of the council's existing estate. It was shared that the Integrated Care Board had agreed to move into Shire Hall later this year, which was good news for the city centre, and also for partnership working with GCC.

4.3 In terms of the budget amendments passed at Budget Council in February, Members were presented with a document which outlined each amendment in detail and allocated a Lead Cabinet Member and Director to each. This document has been published as a supplement to the original meeting papers.

4.4 Noting that some of the overspend in Children's Services remained designated against Covid related pressure, it was queried on what criteria this allocation was made and how long it would remain as a separate budget heading. It was advised that it was expected to disappear for the 2024/25 budget and the Cabinet Member shared the concern around ensuring the expenditure had not been allocated under this heading, when it should have formed part of the base budget for the Service. It was reiterated that the Council had approved a fairly exceptional rise for the 2023/24 budget for

Children's Services plus the creation of a separate revenue reserve of £6m should it be needed.

- 4.5 Members welcomed the update on the 'grow our own' programme within legal services. It was suggested that the Council should consider discussions with the district councils about combining legal services across the local authority community. Although acknowledging the county council had specific specialisms, there were some common threads, and it could provide an opportunity for career development across the different specialisms. It was confirmed that there was no specific policy around bringing more council services back 'in-house' that were currently outsourced, however legal services was a good example of where the council would benefit from training good quality officers and avoid the need to outsource to temporary, and more expensive, alternatives.
- 4.6 A member requested a briefing note update on the Equalities, Diversity, and Inclusion agenda.

**ACTION: Rob Ayliffe**

- 4.7 There was a discussion about highway defects (potholes), both in relation to customer experience and procurement of contracts. Members felt that the reporting mechanism seemed to work very well, where the customers experience was failing however, was during the repair of defects. They shared experience of the current criteria, and possibly restraints within the current contract, meaning that potholes adjacent to each other were not being filled on the same visit. It was felt that potentially allowing slightly more flexibility in contracts, to for example fill a pothole that was 1mm smaller than the set criteria, would result in an overall better impression of value for money and experience of council services for residents.
- 4.8 Officers explained that the improvement journey for customer experience covered all aspects of customer contact with the council, including highway defects, and was focusing on ensuring customers received a timely response from the council, regardless of the specific outcome, as well as equality of service (for example, for residents who did not have access to the internet). The work around defect repairs was being dealt with by the Highways Transformation Board and was a separate piece of working being led by the Lead Cabinet Member for Highways.
- 4.9 On the procurement aspect, Cllr Stowe reiterated that it was very important to have a strategic resource that looked at all contract renewals, tenders, and ongoing management to ensure that, on behalf of the taxpayer, the council was getting good value for money across all departments. He expected the new role of Head of Strategic Procurement, that was currently being recruited to, would bring forward good improvements and deliver genuine savings, without impacting quality of service.

- 4.10 The Committee welcomed this discussion, alongside improvements made to the presentation of performance data and suggested this be an annual discussion post-budget setting. It was added that the 2023/24 performance data would begin in the summer and officers were working to ensure it highlighted progress of this financial year's priorities clearly for the Committee, rather than just within that particular quarter. Feedback from members continued to be welcome on any further improvements that would help them better scrutinise council performance against its priorities.
- 4.11 A member raised concern around the quality of councillor communications in some instances, sharing an example of a particular issue which took the councillor many attempts to try and access information. It was acknowledged that where residents had to escalate issues with elected members, this represented a failure of demand within the council. This was something that would be addressed during the improvements to customer experience.

## **5. FINANCE UPDATE**

- 5.1 The Committee noted the update on the County Council's revenue and capital outturn expenditure for 2022/23, based on forecasts from February 2023 and which had been considered at Cabinet on 29 March 2023.
- 5.2 The current revenue position was showing a £3.8m overspend, of which the largest area continued to be in Childrens Services. There was currently an underspend within the Technical and Countywide budget of £7.4m, which was largely due to additional income of £3.9m from the increase in interest rates, savings contingency of £1.2m which had not needed to be drawn down and some slippage in capital programmes.
- 5.3 For the capital budget, there was currently a £19.2m slippage against the £147m budget which had a lot to do with external factors such as delays in planning applications. There was further detail included in the report.
- 5.4 Concern was raised around the mention of absorbing vacancies to make savings at paragraph 33 of the report. Members were concerned on the impact this could have on existing staff and their workloads. It was advised that it was the choice of the individual manager or service lead, having reviewed the vacancy, whether or not to recruit. Unfortunately, in the current recruitment market, it was often not a deliberate decision not to recruit but rather as a result of being unable to secure suitable candidates. The market had changed dramatically in recent years and the public sector faced huge challenges in competing.
- 5.5 That being said, senior management were keen to keep pushing for managers to try and recruit to vacancies where appropriate and working to improve the 'attractiveness' of a career at GCC. Recruitment officers had carried out a 'deep dive' exercise which included a range of workshops with people who had applied to work at the council and people within other

partner organisations, to understand what would make GCC an attractive employer. There was no doubt certain professions faced an incredible challenge still, but an overall gradual improvement was starting to be seen.

- 5.6 A member queried an overspend detailed under Adult Social Care relating to voids in care homes. It was advised this related to a historical contract with a major supplier where the council purchased 60% of its care home beds. Whilst it made every effort to use the beds, they were not always the appropriate solution and therefore the empty beds still had to be paid for.
- 5.7 It was explained that the concept of 'bed blocking' did not actually relate to care home beds, it related to domiciliary care and the delay in securing the appropriate care package for each individual to return to their own home with the right support. It was a very complex area and very few individuals only needed social care support when leaving hospital.
- 5.8 The Committee noted that maintaining a constant balance of permanent workforce within Children's Service remained a challenge, progress had been made, but unfortunately the number of agency staff had increased over the past few months.
- 5.9 Concern was raised again around the underspend in prevention and wellbeing activities within Public Health. Members stressed that every penny spent on prevention could result in a saving further down the line and felt this was a disconnect knowing the level of health inequality in Gloucestershire.
- 5.10 It was reiterated that public health services around prevention were demand led services and relied completely on residents coming forward and accessing the service. Officers were working to understand why demand had not returned to pre-pandemic levels and different ways they could promote services. Public Health funding was ringfenced and therefore the underspend would not be used elsewhere.
- 5.11 Recalling comments from Budget Council in February around how difficult the 2024/25 budget could be in light of the current economic circumstances, a member asked whether this Committee could be involved at an earlier point in the budget setting processing to be a sounding board for help on these tough decisions.

**ACTION: Steve Mawson**

## **6. IT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY**

- 6.1 The Committee received a presentation on the ICT improvement plan as included in the reports pack.
- 6.2 Referencing the up-and-coming staff survey, members were keen to ensure that it was as open as possible to encourage honest responses. It was explained that the two 'top line issues' being sought by the survey would be

staff's genuine experience today with IT, and what they were expecting to improve in the future. The survey questions were being tested with teams who have had a difficult experience with IT to ensure they were drawing out the right information.

- 6.3 It was added that it would also cover questions around confidence and impact of change on staff as well. Directors were very aware that the IT improvement journey was a massive cultural change for staff, and needed to ensure all colleagues were supported through the journey, regardless of technical capabilities.
- 6.4 Members expressed their frustration at the current stability within IT, they felt some experiences had been appalling and when comparing to other organisations, they were losing confidence that GCC knew what good actually looked like. A member also challenged officers as to whether they really understood what staff needed and if they had a full understanding of what the issues were that needed to be overcome.
- 6.5 Officers acknowledged these comments and shared frustrations with the recent network issues experienced across the council. The majority of these were unfortunately as a result of underestimating the impact the legacy network would have on the migration to Microsoft Office 365. Once the migration had been completed, this would be one of the main hurdles overcome. Some of the next focus areas included refreshing staff equipment, removing the Citrix layer, and improving use of ServiceNow online to report issues.
- 6.6 Officers could not promise that there were not more challenges to come, particularly in removing the legacy system, but gave assurance that the implementation of the IT improvement plan was being managed effectively, today's presentation (and the regular updates received by this Committee) were aimed at giving Members an overview of that journey, rather than a week-by-week programme with in-depth details.
- 6.7 There was a request for a future work plan item to look at feedback from all Directorates on their experience with IT in order to help members better understand staff need.

**ACTION: Democratic Services**

- 6.8 A member questioned the reason why staff were not using ServiceNow to report their issues. It was advised that this was one of the areas the staff survey would be used to try and understand.
- 6.9 It was raised that there was also a need for elected member training to enable councillors to keep up to speed with the changes and make the best use of the technology available. It was advised that officers were in the process of exploring what this would look like and would keep this Committee updated.

## **7. MOTION 910: TACKLING THE CRISIS IN NHS DENTISTRY**

- 7.1 Members were reminded of the resolution detailed in the report which was passed by full Council in February 2023. It was understood that this was resolved to be considered by Corporate Scrutiny because the development of a 'magnet county' sat within the Council Strategy.
- 7.2 The report summarised work done to date on the other resolutions within the motion, particularly by Health Scrutiny, where there had been a discussion with the NHS, the body who had prime responsibility for dentistry in the county. The ask to members today was how they saw their role in exploring this resolution further.
- 7.3 There was a discussion around reallocating the resolution to the appropriate scrutiny areas. The Chair of Health Scrutiny informed members that his committee had already looked at this issue in detail and felt it would make sense to continue this. There was also a suggestion that the idea of making Gloucestershire a 'magnet county' would make sense to be explored at the Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee, who reported they regularly looked into issues around employment.
- 7.4 A member also suggested the idea of a Task and Finish Group to explore this issue in greater depth and provide an objective view on the issue.
- 7.5 In summary, members agreed to split the resolution into two parts and ask:
1. Health Scrutiny to consider a piece of work specifically looking at the recruitment issues of dental professionals.
  2. Economic Growth Scrutiny to consider a broader piece of work around employment in the county, the attraction/barriers of people moving into the county for work ('magnet county'), and this should include a sectoral analysis.
- 7.6 Once each piece of work had been completed, the Chair of the respective Committee should report back to Corporate Scrutiny, at which point if Members felt further work needed to be done, a Task and Finish Group could be considered.
- 7.7 It was added that there was currently a shared initiative called 'Proud to Care' which was piloting a locality focused recruitment campaign for jobs within the care sector. Dentistry had not yet been raised specifically but could become included in the future.

## **8. SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS**

### **Improving Gloucestershire's Bus Services Task Group**

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

- The Group's first meeting was on 18 January 2023. Cllr Wendy Thomas was elected as Chair and members considered their approved one-page strategy to identify areas of focus for future meeting.
- On 17 February 2023 there was an information gathering and scene setting meeting where members heard information on the national and local context, as well as the role and responsibilities of GCC as the Local Transport Authority.
- Their next meeting was due on 19 April where they would be deciding who they wished to consult and hear from officers about the data that GCC holds on bus users (to help inform whether further consultation is necessary).

### **Rural Estates Task group**

- The Group's first meeting was on 1 March 2023 where Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington was elected as Chair and members considered the one-page strategy to identify areas of focus for future meetings.
- Next, on 15 March 2023, they had an information gathering and scene setting meeting with GCC's Rural Estate team on the current Estate, the current Strategic Estate Plan and its opportunities/challenges going forward.
- On 13 April 2023, the Group met with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Southwest and GCC officers to understand and explore the challenges/opportunities for the rural estate in relation to Climate Change, Biodiversity and Regenerative Agriculture.
- At their next meeting, the Group were planning to meet with the Land Workers Alliance and NFU to understand the challenges around access to land, Gloucestershire's food and farming industry and opportunities for land use diversification.
- The Group was also due to attend Gloucestershire Food and Farming Partnership Event on Monday 24 April 2023.

The one-page strategies for each Task Group have been attached.

## **9. WORK PLAN**

Members requested the following items to be added to the work plan:

- Social Value Portal update
- Feedback from all staff Directorates on their experience with IT to help understand staff need
- Communications to councillors
- Employability – to include recruitment and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

**CHAIR**

Meeting concluded at 12:40.



*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

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## CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 28 February 2023

	TOPIC	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	PROGRESS
1	<b>Work Plan</b>	Add recruitment and retention item for discussion at the March lead members meeting.	Democratic Services	Completed
2	<b>Finance update</b>	To seek specific detail on the Community Safety projected overspend.	Steve Mawson	This will be included in the June Cabinet Outturn Report.
3	<b>Finance update</b>	To highlight the above issue for Fire Scrutiny's work plan.	Democratic Services	Completed
4	<b>Finance update</b>	Confirm whether a list of this financial year's large resurfacing schemes would be published.	Steve Mawson	All resurfacing plans are published on the GCC website: <a href="https://www.goucestershire.gov.uk/county-resurfacing-works-highways">County Resurfacing Works - Highways (goucestershire.gov.uk)</a>
5	<b>Strategic Performance</b>	Request an update on Apetito from Sarah Scott	Rob Ayliffe	An update is included in Sarah Scott's report to Adults Social Care and Communities Scrutiny <a href="#">here</a> .
6	<b>Strategic Performance</b>	Request that the delivery of Levelling Up Together grant programme be reviewed for learning opportunities.	Rob Ayliffe	Feedback has been provided to the relevant Director and the officer responsible for this grant programme.
7	<b>Strategic Performance</b>	Ask the relevant risk owners to update their comments (SR 12.1) in light of the feedback given.	Rob Ayliffe	Feedback passed on to be updated in time for next quarter.
8	<b>Corporate Resources</b>	Consider future IT training for members	Steve Mawson	Work is ongoing, an update was shared with Members at their meeting on 19 April 2023.



## CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19 April 2023

	TOPIC	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	PROGRESS
1	<b>Update from the Deputy Leader</b>	Provide a briefing note on work done to date around Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) improvements.	Rob Ayliffe	Emailed to members 26 May 2023.
2	<b>Finance update</b>	To consider how the Committee could become involved earlier in the 2024/25 budget setting process.	Steve Mawson	Currently being discussed and considered.
3	<b>Motion 910: Tackling the Crisis in NHS Dentistry</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask Health Scrutiny to consider a piece of work specifically looking at the recruitment issues around dental professionals.</li> <li>2. Ask Economic Growth Scrutiny to consider a broader piece of work around employment in the county, its attraction/barriers of people moving into the county for work ('magnet county'), and this should include a sectoral analysis.</li> </ol>	Democratic Services	Communicated to the Democratic Services lead officer for each Committee.
4	<b>Work Plan additions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Value Portal update</li> <li>• Feedback from all staff Directorates on their experience with IT to help understand the needs of staff</li> <li>• Communications to councillors</li> <li>• Employability item – to include recruitment and EDI</li> </ul>	Democratic Services	Will be discussed and scheduled for Committee consideration at the Lead Members meeting in June.

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