

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Shire Hall, Gloucester on Wednesday 27 September 2023

Present:

Cllr Ben Evans	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller
Cllr Andrew Gravells MBE	Cllr Alan Preest (Chair)
Cllr Colin Hay	Cllr Lisa Spivey
Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Cllr Wendy Thomas (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Nick Housden	Cllr Chloe Turner

Apologies: Cllr Matt Babbage, Cllr Terry Hale and Cllr Kathy Williams

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

2.1 Subject to the following amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2023 were confirmed and agreed as a correct record of that meeting.

2.2 Section 4.3 of the minutes amended to read: *Officers advised that they did receive more routine and regular benchmarking data, but that it was less complete, which was why a yearly report was brought to Committee once all areas were available and appropriate analysis could be made. Although out of date by the time it was considered by the committee, it was still a useful prompt for any performance areas that needed attention. Usually, at this point, officers were able to reassure the committee that the areas in question had been picked up and acted on.*

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

4 FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT - QUARTER 1 2023/24

4.1 The following reports were presented as a single item and considered as a combined report: -

- i. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Performance, Risk and Financial Monitoring (Quarter 1) Report 2023-24
- ii. Corporate Performance Monitoring Report (Scorecard) Quarter 1 2023-24
- iii. Strategic Risk Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2023-24
- iv. Finance Performance and Risk Meeting Performance Report Quarter 1 2023/24 (Corporate Resources)

4.2 To view the detail of the reports, please refer to the link published on the County Council website at the link [here](#).

4.3 Paul Blacker, Director of Finance, introduced the item with an overview of the current Revenue Forecast Outturn Position 2023/24. The following points were highlighted in reports circulated in advance of the meeting: -

- i. The current forecast for the year end revenue position showed a balanced position against the revenue budget of £567.133 million, based on forecasts made in July 2023.
- ii. The largest variances identified at the time of the meeting included a £4.970 million forecast overspend in the Children and Families Budget. The overspend to be offset by the £4.557 million underspend in the Economy, Environment & Infrastructure Budget and a £1.507 million underspend in Technical & Countywide Budgets.
- iii. National negotiations continued to seek 2023/24 Green Book pay awards. Current budgets and forecasts included an allowance of 4.5% to offset this, subject to the potential risk that the final agreement could result in a larger increase. Any excess to be managed through General Fund reserves.
- iv. On 21 June 2023, Cabinet approved a carry forward of £1.748 million from the COVID emergency grant to fund ongoing commitments associated with the recovery from the pandemic. The full amount of the carry forward was reflected in the current forecast.
- v. Referencing delivery of the Council's Savings Programme, it was reported that at the end of Quarter 1, £11.796 million savings had been achieved, representing 55.9% of the annual target, with a further £4.280 million savings forecast to be delivered against a target of £21.101 million.
- vi. A total of £5.026 million was forecast to be at risk of being delivered by the end of 2023/24, representing 23.82% of the annual target. The most significant elements considered to be at risk included £3.895 million Adult Social Care Savings, £200k income targets across Economy, Environment & Infrastructure budgets and £604k income targets across Corporate Resources and Technical & Countywide budgets.
- vii. The current capital budget for 2023/24 was reported at £156.567 million. Actual spend against the capital programme at the end of June was reported at £21.532 million.
- viii. The forecast outturn position for 2023/24, based on forecasts set out in July 2023, (Period 4), was forecast at £156.524 million against a budget of £156.567 million. This reflected a forecast in-year underspend of £43k.
- ix. All service areas were forecast to spend within £250k of current budgets.
- x. A recommended increase in the capital budget was proposed to Cabinet at £1.582 million. Details of the increases are set out in the Performance, Risk and Financial Monitoring (Quarter 1) Report and can be viewed at the link [here](#).
- xi. At the time of the meeting, the capital spend for Quarter 1 reflected a reduced figure for 2023/24. It was explained that this was due to slippage on the capital programme in 2022/23, and subsequent impact on future years.

- xii. Less capital spend was anticipated from funding borrowed in 2023/24. This was due to slippage in schemes funded from borrowing required to address the volatile nature of capital spend.

Questions:

4.4 Several members of the committee expressed concern about the forecast overspend in the Children and Families Budget and asked how this would be managed going forward.

4.5 It was noted that increased energy costs had impacted on the council's spending. However, income generated from waste diverted from landfill had remained fairly consistent over the past year and could be used to offset energy costs. Other waste measures were also performing well with 52.5% of household waste being sent for recycling, reuse or composting. Current forecasts demonstrated the lowest level of residual waste per household since first reported in 2011.

4.6 Expanding on the impact of income generated from waste, it was explained that waste tonnages were currently forecast at the levels forecast for the 2022/23 financial year, and therefore lower than originally forecast. This was reflected in a forecast £540k underspend against recycling credit payments and £60k underspend against bulking and haulage costs. Actual tonnages continued to be monitored closely and updated accordingly.

4.7 Noting a higher than anticipated £1.9 million forecast of income generated by the energy from waste facility and £1.7 million forecast underspend from a combination of lower volumes of waste being processed in year and higher third-party fee income evidenced by the 2022/23 outturn, members reflected on the significant influence waste generated income was having on the council's budget.

4.8 Responding to a request for more detail on 'waste' performance indicators, it was agreed that a briefing note would be circulated to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee after the meeting. In addition, it was suggested that the Environment Scrutiny Committee should be asked to consider the performance indicators in more depth with regular updates at future committee meetings. This would be supplemented by periodical reports back to this committee. **Action by – Corporate Finance Team**

4.9 Acknowledging concerns about the forecast overspend in the Children and Families Budget, it was agreed that delivery of this service area was an area of significant risk and uncertainty. Refuting suggestions that the council budget might have been set with unachievable targets, Steve Mawson, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Corporate Resources, reassured members that, despite the volatility in some budget areas, the use of general reserves and careful monitoring would help achieve an overall balanced budget in the long-term. The Deputy Chief Executive expressed his disappointment that, whilst the councils financial performance had appeared encouraging during the early part of the financial year, this had declined in recent months.

4.10 It was agreed that the cost of living crisis and changes in the county's demographics were key influences in achieving a balanced budget. Ongoing pressures from the delivery of adult social care services, both nationally and in the county, were also key determinants.

4.11 Paul Blacker, Director of Finance, informed members that when producing the council budget, it was important to consider the budget as a whole and to plan for several contingencies, including any impact from inflation. It was agreed it was important for members to consider the budget from a corporate perspective rather than focusing on specific areas.

4.12 Allowing sufficient time for stability, it was anticipated that the council's year end revenue budget for 2023/24 would achieve a balanced position.

4.13 Specific actions and requests for information at the meeting included: -

- i. That the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee consider performance indicators on school absenteeism and exclusions
- ii. That road traffic accident and community safety continue to be closely monitored

Welcoming the new approach to considering performance and risk reporting at the meeting, members noted the information and thanked officers for the detailed presentation.

5 COUNCIL ESTATE

5.1 Neil Corbett, Assistant Director of Asset Management & Property Services, attended the meeting by remote access to give a presentation on the Council's Estate.

To view the full presentation, please refer to the link [here](#)

5.2 Forming part of the presentation, members attention was drawn to the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan 2019-2024. Approved by Cabinet on 24 April 2019, the plan sets out key objectives and supporting principles adopted to manage the council's estate. To view the asset management plan, please refer to the link [here](#)

5.3 Outlining some of the key initiatives undertaken following approval of the plan, members were advised of the following achievements: -

- £117m Capital Receipts achieved since 2011
- 3.977m One Public Estate Grant Funding to support One Gloucestershire
- Estate initiatives
- Agile Working Programme and creation of Locality Hubs
- Re-purposing of existing buildings for service use

- Quayside House Development (relocation of two GP practices and a Pharmacy)
- Creation of New Schools: High School, Leckhampton, Brook Academy, Brockworth and acquisition of site for a new primary school at Bishops Cleeve
- Gloucestershire Care Partnership Strategy
- Land acquisitions for the M5 Junction 10 Improvement Scheme

5.4 Forming part of the Council Strategy 2022-26, (Building Back Better in Gloucestershire), members noted some of the Council's further ambitions from which to maximise use of the Council Estate, including the continued modernisation and improvement to the Shire Hall complex to make the building accessible, fit for purpose and more suitable for agile working. It was confirmed that the Council, in conjunction with business partners, continued to proactively seek ways to reduce the council's carbon footprint and increase renewable energy generation.

5.5 Specific actions and requests for information raised at the meeting included: -

- i. No decisions had been made on the future use of the current library building located on Brunswick Road, Gloucester. Pending discussions with Gloucester City Council, details on the decision to be shared with members. **Action by - Assistant Director of Asset Management & Property Services**
- ii. A member requested improvements to political group rooms and external areas adjacent to Shire Hall form part of site modernisation programme.
- iii. It was agreed members would be provided with locality maps to identify estate buildings and key work within their divisions. **Action by - Assistant Director of Asset Management & Property Services**
- iv. Questioning the pace at which the council's climate change strategy was being applied to estate buildings, including new schools, members were informed that the Council was doing all it could to progress the work. It was explained that each building required a fundamental review of its carbon footprint and that the process could be complex and lengthy.
- v. An Economy, Environment and Infrastructure Climate Change Officer had recently been appointed to consider solar renewables and climate change issues on the corporate estate.
- vi. A member asked that the council consider the storage/re-use of batteries as part of its climate change strategy.
- vii. Another member suggested an all member briefing be arranged to advise members of the plans for schools located on the council estate. The suggestion was noted. **Action by – Democratic Services**
- viii. Responding to questions on local issues, including the refurbishment of the Magistrates Court at Cheltenham, members were asked to submit any

questions relating to their divisions in writing to allow the Assistant Director and the Property Services Team to respond in detail.

- ix. Referring to a recent visit to Wotton Lawn Hospital by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Chair of the Committee informed members that at the visit there had been reports of delays in patient discharge from the hospital due to a lack of available accommodation following discharge. The matter was suggested as an item for consideration by the Adult Social Care and Communities Scrutiny Committee with agreement that the issue be considered for inclusion on the committee work plan. **Action by – Democratic Services**
- x. In response to a request for officers to consider occupancy levels at Shire Hall and best use of space, it was explained that Phase 1 of the placing and relocation of teams within Shire Hall had not yet completed and that occupancy levels were still being monitored. Work was ongoing and progress was being made, including work with district authorities.
- xi. During the discussion, a member asked if the locations of teams could be shared with members to make it more accessible for councillors to meet with officers. The request was noted, with agreement that the matter be followed up with members outside of the meeting. **Action by – Director for Policy, Performance & Governance**

The report was noted.

6 COUNCILLOR COMMUNICATIONS

6.1 Rob Ayliffe, Director for Policy, Performance & Governance, outlined proposals on how the committee might enhance councillor communications. Explaining that, in previous years a written protocol had been used to inform the arrangements, it was confirmed no protocol existed at this present time.

6.2 It was anticipated everyone would benefit from the proposals and that the introduction of a clear written protocol would be the most effective source of establishing good communications.

6.3 Speaking in support of the proposal, one member questioned the terminology and use of technical language used by officers, and asked that the style of communication be considered when sharing information with councillors. It was agreed communications should be as brief and as succinct as possible.

6.4 Another member suggested that the protocol form part of the member induction programme, with clear guidance on the remit and responsibilities of members when being asked to share or pass on information.

6.5 Welcoming the proposal of a written Councillor Communication Protocol, it was agreed that a draft protocol would be produced for consideration by the committee at a later date. **Action: Rob Ayliffe, Director for Policy, Performance & Governance**

7 WORK PLAN

7.1 The committee was asked to submit any items for consideration at future meetings via email.

7.2 Noting the large number of items included on the committee work plan for consideration at the December meeting, members were asked to reflect on the recommendations and to prioritise those items they believed should be added to the agenda and considered at the meeting. **Action: Committee**

7.3 Cllr Wendy Thomas enquired about the progress of Motion 926: Hunting with dogs on Council Land. Agreed at the full council meeting on 13 September 2023, the motion states that: *Council is opposed to the use of Gloucestershire County Council land for trail hunting, exempt hunting, as defined in Section 2 and Schedule 1 of the Hunting Act 2004, hound exercise and hunt meets and asks that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee establish a cross party working group to consider, and make recommendations to Council, on any actions that could be taken in respect of this matter.*

7.4 It was agreed that the motion would be considered as part of the discussion at the next committee work planning meeting. **Action: Chair/Democratic Services**

7.5 Members noted that the committee meeting on 10 January 2024 was a budget discussion meeting. Items relating to the Corporate Peer Challenge and suggested by officers had been added to the committee work plan as tentative items.

8 FUTURE MEETINGS

6 December 2023

Budget Scrutiny Meeting – Tuesday 10 January 2024

27 February 2024

24 April 2024

29 May 2024

10 July 2024

25 September 2024

11 December 2024

CHAIRPERSON

The meeting ended at 12.40pm