

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 24 April 2024 at the Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Terry Hale	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller
Cllr Colin Hay	Cllr Alan Preest (Chair)
Cllr Nick Housden	Cllr Chloe Turner

Substitutes: Cllr John Bloxsom
Cllr Bernard Fisher
Cllr Roger Whyborn

Apologies: Cllr Matt Babbage, Cllr Ben Evans, Cllr Andrew Gravells MBE, Cllr Jeremy Hilton, Cllr Lisa Spivey and Cllr Kathy Williams

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes from the meeting held on 27 February 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4. STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 Mandy Quayle, Director of People and Digital Services, Eleanor Hutchinson, Head of HR and Wendy Cooper, Head of Organisational Development, gave a presentation on the recent staff survey results, and data drawn from staff Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) as well as exit interviews. Members noted the following:

- Slide 1 gave an overview of how the survey was run on an annual basis. It was a detailed survey including around 90 questions within 11 different categories.
- Completion rates tracking was available from 2016 onwards and this year had shown the highest completion rate achieved so far. A target had been set of 70% across the organisation and overall completion landed at 69%. This had therefore resulted in access to more data and therefore more actions for change that could be taken as a result. All directorates had exceeded their previous completion rates.
- The survey was always supported by an enhanced communication plan, and this year it gave every directorate an opportunity to spotlight their progress over the past year. This was a good way of showing staff that their responses were being listened to and acted upon.

- There was also a change in methodology this year, which had been driven by feedback from staff and best practise, and which resulted in a switch to a 5-point rating scale (from a previous 4-point scale). The previous scale forced the respondent to either agree or disagree or decline the question, whereas having a 5-point scale allowed respondents to give a neutral response.
- The change made the reporting a lot more complex, the data teams had a lot of information to work through to provide the summary report, however the resulting data was a lot richer.
- This year's survey also had more free comments built-in which had generated around 6,500 comments from staff.
- Slide 4 showed an overview of the 11 categories within the survey and average scores for the organisation within each one. Anything above 75% would be seen as a positive for the organisation. The two key areas that needed more focus was communication and change management.
- Slides 5 and 6 gave some highlights of the survey for Members which included that staff enjoyed working at GCC, they felt safe and motivated to give their best and 87% of staff would recommend the Council as a place to work. There was strong alignment with values and leadership results were showing a greater strength in line management capability.
- Communications and change were also the two areas where the largest number of neutral scores had been given.
- Overall, the staff survey had resulted in a very positive set of results, which largely showed progression in terms of culture and staff commitment to working at the Council.
- There had been an improving picture over the past 3 years in terms of PDR completion rates. These were focused on having high quality conversations with staff, setting objectives, looking back at what had been achieved and also development and learning for the future.
- Slide 9 showed a summary of linked themes that you would expect to see if the PDR process was working properly and the staff survey results. Again overall, there were some good scores in most of the areas, although there was clearly room for improvement in terms of completion rates and opportunities for career development.
- Slide 10 showed that exit data largely echoed the results of the staff survey, and it also picked up on similar areas of good and need for improvement.

4.2 Members raised that they were aware of ongoing concerns in relation to IT, particularly how improvements were managed and communicated to staff. Officers recognised that staff were feeling under pressure due to the sheer volume of change with IT infrastructure recently, acknowledging the need to provide clarity on the improvement journey and risks associated. They did however emphasise that IT concerns had seen a massive shift from being about unstable infrastructure to keeping up with the pace of change. Whilst accepting that the latter still presented issues for staff, it was a move in the right direction. Evidence from all three routes of staff feedback presented on today were not showing IT as a fundamental issue in the past 12 months.

- 4.3 An action was taken to ensure a specific question on relationship with IT was asked via the online exit questionnaire, it was noted that if staff opted to have a face-to-face exit interview, this would be included.

ACTION: Mandy Quayle

- 4.4 Referring to the result around visibility of Corporate Leadership, it was noted that a lot of work was ongoing in this area, for example, arranging regular question and answer session for directorates, directors attending team meetings etc. It was added that around 32% of responses to this question were neutral and it was therefore very important to understand the reasoning behind these. It may be, for example, that visibility of Corporate Leadership was less important to some staff. Members were advised that a much more detailed response summary was shared with individual directorates and their associated Employee Voice Groups to understand any particular themes and identify different responses between directorates. A copy of these would be shared with the Committee.

ACTION: Mandy Quayle

- 4.5 Improvement on PDR completion rates was an issue the Committee had been engaged with for some time, and whilst today's presentation showed significant improvement, the number of PDRs completed across the organisation was still not where it should be. Members stressed that this was a very important mechanism in gaining feedback from staff, as well as allowing staff the space to talk about their issues and future development at the Council. It was agreed that this Committee should write to all directors to emphasise the importance of continued improvement.

ACTION: Chair

- 4.6 In response, it was acknowledged that there remained room for improvement on PDR completion rates, and there was also still a mismatch between the number of PDRs completed (77.4% in Quarter 4) and the number of staff saying they had a PDR in the past year via the staff survey (91%). It was reported to the Committee previously that managers had been carrying out PDRs but not completing the online form to say they had, which was where the completion rates data was drawn from. Future plans to digitalise the process, with associated alerts for managers etc., hoped to make further improvements in this area.
- 4.7 Looking at the response around communication, it was questioned whether the issue was around the content of communication, or the ability to communicate between leadership and employees. It was advised that the team were beginning to understand that it was more about communication across teams and directorates, outside of 'silos' and being more transparent and open with information. The Corporate Resources Employee Voice Group

were also exploring how to factor in the 'two-way' conversation and encourage feedback from staff.

- 4.8 A member raised concern about the negative response to career progression opportunities, emphasising the need for the Council to focus on growing its own talent and developing future leaders. As with similar areas for concern, there was a high level of neutral responses within this section, which may indicate a group of responses for whom career progression was not currently a priority, for example.

5. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE 2023 - ACTION PLAN

- 5.1 Rob Ayliffe introduced the attached Action Plan by reminding members that this had been produced as a response to the [Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report](#) which had been considered at the previous meeting. The Plan had been submitted back to the Local Government Association (LGA) but would remain a 'living' plan and therefore members feedback would be welcome to take forward as part of a regular review.
- 5.2 At the meeting in February, the Committee's feedback was particularly focused on Recommendation's 2 and 5, and the officer highlighted the actions resulting under Recommendation 7 as areas of particular relevance to members within their role.
- 5.3 It was confirmed that the Protocol on Informing Local Members had been approved at a recent Constitution Committee and was currently with directors to cascade to their teams. It was accepted that it would take some time to embed fully the Protocol would be one of the focuses at the next Leadership Conference in May, and relevant training and further support would be offered where appropriate. Members were asked to continue to share examples of where they were not being sufficiently informed, as these would be used to continue to raise awareness.
- 5.4 Both directors present at the meeting made a firm commitment to members that this was a priority for them and CLT as a whole, to ensure this improvement was made. A copy of the final version of the Protocol can be found as an Annex to these minutes.
- 5.5 It was suggested that an update on progress against the Action Plan could be considered at Committee in September, which was prior to the peer feedback exercise scheduled for November.

ACTION: Explore providing a briefing for members on the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy, and its evolution from the Vision 2050 exercise, prior to Cabinet's consideration in May 2024 if possible.

ACTION: To provide further information on the structure around the new City Region Board.

6. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2022/23

- 6.1 The Chair advised members that the Annual Scrutiny Report was due to be considered at the next Council meeting in May 2024 and this was the opportunity for the Committee to ask questions on its content and suggested any amendments if required.
- 6.2 It was advised that the item summaries included in the report did not cover all scrutiny work but instead focused on two key items per committee where an example of the full scrutiny process could be seen, for example, where an item had resulted in a recommendation or action. It was also noted that the whilst the task group/cabinet panel section included groups that were outside of the 2022 – 23 period, this report was used to allow members to track regular progress of the recommendations and therefore would include groups that were pre or post the relevant period.
- 6.3 Committee agreed an action for the Chair to write to the Lead Cabinet Member to request that a response to the Rural Estate Task Group report be brought to Committee as soon as possible.

ACTION: Chair

- 6.4 Members agreed for this version of the report to go forward to full Council in May.

7. WORK PLAN

- 7.1 Reviewing the Committee's work plan, members made the following amendments:
- Due to the May agenda being particularly busy, it was agreed to move the Cyber Security update to the July meeting.
 - To add the Motion 926 – Hunting with Dogs on Council Land item as tentative for July. Members noted that the proposer and seconder of the motion were currently considering a briefing note to understand the Council's capacity to influence change in this area.
 - To add the response to the Rural Estate Task Group recommendations tentative for September, but in hope that this is received before then.
 - Items for the future list were agreed as follows: Data, Information, and Intelligence Strategy and Review of Scrutiny.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 11:50

For a full overview of this meeting, please use the following link to access the recording:
<https://gloucestershire.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>

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

Gloucestershire County Council Protocol on Informing Local Members

Introduction

1. County Councillors carry out a number of different roles across the Council, but from the point of view of their constituents, their most important and visible role is as representatives of their local area. They are often the first point of contact when residents, community groups and town and parish councils want a problem to be dealt with, are affected by a decision the council has made, or are concerned about an issue affecting their local area.
2. When they are equipped and supported to do so, they can play an effective role in communicating with local residents about what the Council is doing at a local level, and as importantly, why they are doing it.
3. For that reason, it is important that county councillors are appropriately briefed and informed about local issues affecting their division before other groups and before the Council makes public announcements. The aim must be to make sure a member is never in a situation where the first they know about an issue affecting their division is when they are contacted about it by a member of the public or the media.
4. This protocol is not intended to replace existing arrangements where those exist, but it does set clear standards and expectations that all parts of the Council are expected to meet. Responsibility for implementing the protocol rests with Executive Directors and Directors within their Directorate. This includes making sure that all relevant staff are aware of its requirements.
5. Except where information is being provided routinely (for example, as part of a regular, agreed cycle of reporting), approval should always be obtained from the relevant Head of Service before information is provided under this protocol. The relevant Cabinet Member should be copied in to the information being provided.
6. General information about the Council is made available through Members Matters - the Council's weekly e-bulletin for Councillors. However, if a matter affects a specific member's electoral division, then that member should be contacted directly.
7. It is equally important that members inform the relevant officers of significant issues of which they become aware, and which will have an impact on the County Council and its services.

8. Details of county councillors and their electoral divisions are available on the Council's website and via Democratic Services.
9. This protocol should be read in conjunction with:
 - a. The protocol on the relationship between members and officers of Gloucestershire County Council
 - b. The Access to Information Rules set out in the Council's constitution
 - c. Politics and publicity protocol

When should something be regarded as a 'local issue'

10. This protocol applies to issues related to and/or decisions made by the County Council and its services. Although the Council will make every effort to inform members of wider issues affecting their area, Council officers will not always be aware of such issues or in a position to inform councillors about them.
11. An issue or decision is considered to be a "local issue" when it has a significant direct impact and is restricted to a single particular electoral division.
12. However, recognising that electoral divisions do not always coincide with natural communities, where an issue straddles the boundaries of two or more divisions, it will still be treated as a "local issue" and each county councillor will be informed.

Where a single matter affects two or more divisions (whether adjoining or not), consideration should be given to applying this protocol. Issues involving more than three divisions will not usually fall within the scope of this protocol.

When should an issue be regarded as 'significant'

13. Any issue arising from a key decision to be taken by Cabinet, a Cabinet Member or an Officer will be regarded as significant.
14. Other decisions and issues should be regarded as significant if they will or are likely to:
 - a. be controversial or contentious;
 - b. be of concern to the general public, a local community, or local community groups;
 - c. directly affect or involve a local parish or town council;
 - d. involve any form of consultation exercise with local residents or business in a single or maximum of three divisions;
 - e. involve a public meeting in or about that division;

- f. involve a planning matter that will be determined by the County Council.
15. Appendix 1 includes a list of examples of the types of issues falling under this protocol.
16. In considering how to apply this protocol, Officers must be alert to issues which are, or are likely to be, contentious or politically sensitive, and be aware of the implications for local members, the media or other sections of the public.

Exceptions

17. Issues do not fall within this protocol under the following circumstances:
- a. Where it is about the provision of a personal service to an individual, unless that individual has expressly asked for the involvement of the County Councillor and has given their consent for the information to be shared, or where the issue is already in the wider public domain;
 - b. Where it relates to formative or draft proposals, where public consultation or engagement is still some way off;
 - c. Where it involves the personal circumstances of a member of staff;
 - d. Where the Council owes a duty of confidence towards some other person or body that cannot be overridden by this protocol.

Means of notifying local members

18. The means of notification may vary from service to service depending on how frequently notification events occur. For example, highways may wish to proactively notify local members of their programmed works on a routine, cyclical basis, whereas other services may do so on an ad hoc basis as issues arise.
19. Notification should be via telephone or email (using the Councillor's GCC email address). Emails should be addressed to the member concerned and have a subject line that makes clear the topic and its relevance to the member.
20. Where the information being shared is sensitive, confidential or subject to an embargo, the communication should make that clear.
21. Members should be notified as far in advance as is reasonably practicable. Where an issue arises at short notice (i.e. less than 5 working days in advance), additional efforts should be made to ensure that the notification has

been received, recognising that not all members access their council email addresses on a daily basis.

22. There may be occasions when an issue is so sensitive or contentious that members cannot be notified in advance. In such exceptional cases, the executive may reserve the right to inform members either at the same time as releasing information to the wider public, or only slightly in advance of doing so. In those cases, those members will be invited to a face-to-face briefing with the relevant cabinet member and/or Senior Officer in order to brief them on the issue and explain the reasons for maintaining confidentiality.

Other provisions under this protocol

23. When the council is arranging a public meeting within or about a member's division, the local member should be invited as far in advance as possible, and reasonable efforts should be made to accommodate their availability.
24. Any media release organised by the communications team that relates to a single member's division will seek to involve the relevant local County Councillor where possible.

Responsibilities of members

25. Members should check their GCC email address on a regular basis to ensure that they are aware of any notifications.
26. Members must not make public nor make personal use of any information or material supplied to them where the person providing the information has indicated that it is of a confidential nature. They must also comply with any relevant provisions of access to information legislation, including the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.
27. Members must respect any embargoes relating to information provided to them under this protocol.
28. When a member wishes to speak either at a Council meeting or in another public forum about a local issue in another member's division, they should seek wherever possible to give them prior warning as a matter of courtesy.
29. Local members are reminded that they do not have the right to commit the Council or its officers to any particular course of action so should avoid giving member(s) of the public any false impression or undertaking that they are not in a position to personally fulfil.

Working in Partnership

30. This protocol applies to issues arising from Gloucestershire County Council. Partner organisations may have their own protocols and procedures in place. When working in partnership with other local organisations, officers should help partners understand the role of local members and to consider whether they should be informed about a particular issue. Information should be shared with the local member only where the partner organisation has agreed to its release. If in doubt, advice should be sought from the relevant GCC Head of Service.

31. When an issue falls within the scope of this protocol that has an impact beyond GCC's own services, it may also be appropriate to inform the relevant District Councillors. In such cases, District Councillors should only be informed once the County Councillor is aware of the issue, and with the agreement of the relevant Head of Service. Advice can be sought from Democratic Services.

Monitoring and Review

32. The Council's Head of Democratic Services shall be responsible for monitoring the operation of this protocol on a day-to-day basis.

33. The Constitution Committee shall be responsible for reviewing this protocol at whatever frequency it sees fit.

Date Agreed: 22 January 2024

Appendix 1: Examples of issues falling within this protocol

Changes to services provided or maintained by the Council (whether provided directly, commissioned, or delivered in partnership):

- New services or facilities
- Changes to opening hours or admission arrangements
- Changes to the type of service provided
- Introduction, withdrawal or changes to fees and charges
- Closures, including partial, temporary or permanent
- Expansion or significant alteration of facilities or premises
- Planned or programmed highways works (in advance)
- Significant highways emergency works (as they arise)
- Planned or programmes building or significant maintenance work
- Changes to 'catchment' areas of council services
- School closures or amalgamations

When the Council is consulting or taking decisions on:

- Planning applications
- Traffic management
- Local transport matters
- Highways and bridge design
- Traffic calming measures
- Public rights of way
- Property disposals
- Applications for new safety certificates for sports grounds

Outcome of inspections / regulatory activities of local provision

Controversies (such as forthcoming court hearings, inquests, deaths, missing clients where there is a direct link to local service provision)

Major incidents, accidents or emergencies

Communicable disease outbreaks

Significant health protection or public safety issues

Issues relating to the presence of travellers

High profile enforcement activities

Any local issues subject to media releases

Communications with parish and town councils, or (in unparished areas) community or neighbourhood partnerships or forums, including when an officer is invited to attend such a meeting