

**ECONOMY AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
30 November 2009**

Present: Councillors Andrew Wall, Garth Barnes, Tim Cooper, Bernard Fisher, Stuart Hutton, Paul Massey, Malcolm Stennett (chair), and Pat Thornton.

Apologies: Councillors Robin MacDonald and Paul Wheeldon.

Other members in attendance: Councillor Steve Jordan and Councillor John Webster.

6.00 pm to 8.10 pm

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meetings held on 11 November be approved as a correct record.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None

4. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

- a) By Council – none
- b) By Cabinet - none

5. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

Leader

- advised that Gloucestershire First was undergoing a restructure. Gloucestershire First was the operating title of the Gloucestershire Development Agency (GDA) One of the proposals was that the size of the board was reduced to 25 people. Currently the council had two representatives on the board, the Leader and a supporting officer, and under the new proposals this would be reduced to one. The intention was for this to be the Leader. There would also be two seminars per year to reach a wider audience. The future of the council's relationship with Gloucestershire First was also being reviewed. Action plans were currently being driven by the LABGI funds given to district councils and in the future these would go straight to the county which could change the relationship.
- regarding the Business Rent Relief Scheme the intention was to deal with any bids from businesses in tranches, the first leading up to the 31st of December. The bids would be reviewed by a cross-party panel and be reported back to Cabinet. He invited two members from the committee to join him on the panel.

RESOLVED: that Councillor Stennett and subject to his agreement, Councillor Cooper be appointed to the cross-party panel to review the bids for the rent relief scheme and make recommendations to Cabinet.

Cabinet Member Finance And Community Development

- advised that budget proposals for 2010/11 were currently being drawn up and these would go to Cabinet on the 15th of December for approval to go out to consultation. They would come to this committee on the 25th of January. The proposals this year would be in a new format which was intended to give more clarity and increase understanding. The proposals would also list the officer recommendations which had been rejected by Cabinet as well as those agreed.

- in a response to a question about the Icelandic Banks situation, he advised that provided the council's preferred creditor status was upheld, the government would allow the council to capitalise its debt up to a maximum of £1.5 million. The negotiations were being led by the LGA on behalf of all local authorities and a formula was being used to determine the level of pay back. He warned that creditors who did not have preferred creditor status may challenge this in the courts which could delay payment.

6. CHELTENHAM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (agenda item 7)

The chair welcomed Jill Crook, the chair of the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership (CSP) and Richard Gibson, the policy and performance manager, to the meeting.

In her introduction Jill Crook highlighted a number of points in the covering report which had been circulated. She referred to the financial context set out in paragraph 5 and the financial contributions given by other partners indicated the importance they gave to the CSP. There were good examples of the delivery partnerships working well together to manage the overlaps. She was confident that the CSP had taken on board the comments of the IDeA peer review particularly in clarifying the focus of the executive group. In these challenging economic times, a key focus for the CSP would be value for money, risk-sharing and working on common agendas. She felt that it was particularly important to have a local partnership such as the CSP to ensure the particular problems of Cheltenham were addressed.

There were a number of questions from members which are listed below together with the responses:

- Councillor Wall was concerned that of the six partners on the CSP, the council provided 40% of the funds as well as considerable officer time. Was it therefore an equal partnership?
 - The policy and performance manager advised that in 2009/10, there was additional one-off funding from the council including a carried forward sum for the low carbon partnership and £30,000 for the child poverty programme. This made it proportionally higher in that year. Jill Crook said that financing was a historical issue and partners should be judged on what value they could bring to the table. She acknowledged that given the challenging economic situation some partners may have to review their contributions so the CSP must demonstrate good value for money outcomes. She also encouraged the council to benchmark their contributions against other similar local authorities.
- Councillor Wall was concerned that the report highlighted progress to date but questioned what real outcomes had been achieved. For example a conference had been held in April but what had happened since?

- The policy and performance manager said that the CSP were making real progress in harmonising their policies and procedures. In terms of the conference, this was the basis for partners to take forward the neighbourhood management proposals which are currently being consulted on..
- Councillor Thornton asked what had been achieved with the money allocated to five areas of Cheltenham listed in the table under the Children and Young People's partnership.
 - The policy and performance manager advised that the details were all available on the Council's website and had not been included here as the remit of the committee was to scrutinise the CSP.
- Councillor Stennett asked how the grant allocations to partnerships were decided.
 - Jill Crook advised that the role of the CSP was to set the overall framework for decisions on the bids put forward by the various thematic partnerships.
- Councillor Hutton referred to the 20 year vision and asked how it was implemented and updated on a year to year basis. How would the CSP measure their success when they look back in five years time?
 - The policy and performance manager advised that the CSP did seek to implement their vision through influencing longer-term initiatives such as Civic Pride and the local development framework.
Jill Crook said that the CSP had a responsibility to deliver targets within the county's Local Area Agreement and their success would be measured by their contribution to the wider Gloucestershire partnership framework.
- Councillor Massey referred to the terms of reference and asked what action would be taken where no protocols existed for important areas such as information sharing and fairness and diversity.
 - The policy and performance manager acknowledged that this was an area under review and where appropriate the Gloucestershire County Council standard would be adopted.
- Councillor Wall referred to the focus of the low carbon partnership on energy and transport and asked what had happened to the other important areas initially identified.
 - Jill Crook indicated that the initial list had reflected the longer-term vision and there had been a need to prioritise in the first year. Other areas had not been abandoned but may be covered in different timeframes.
- Councillor Stennett pointed out that there was an error in appendix C which referred to the refurbishment by young people of a room at Prestbury Pavilion for youth work. He advised that the room had not been refurbished but had simply been made available at no cost by the Parish Council. He requested that greater care be taken in ensuring factual accuracy in any reports.
 - The policy and performance manager said he would look into this and respond back to Councillor Stennett.

The Chairman thanked Jill Crook and the Policy and Performance manager for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED: that it be recommended to Cabinet that when considering future funding for the CSP, the Cabinet should be very aware of how success is being measured and must satisfy themselves that the partnership is being successfully managed and that value for money is being achieved in terms of outcomes for local people in Cheltenham.

7. HALF YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT AND CORPORATE STRATEGY 2010 – 2015 (agenda item 8)

The policy and performance manager introduced his report which had been circulated with the agenda.

Members noted the good progress highlighted in the report but wanted more information on the milestones that had been deferred or where deadlines had changed. In response the policy and performance manager said that more information was available on the performance management system but confirmed that he could include an additional summary statement in future reports.

Regarding complaints, a member asked whether more information could be given on the number of complaints upheld and whether the council had done anything wrong. The policy and performance manager said that it was an issue of terminology and the Assistant Chief Executive said that when responding to complaints the council did not acknowledge whether it had been “right or wrong”. However they would review the reports to see how the data could be enhanced.

In response to a question from a member, the policy and performance manager confirmed that the percentages listed in the report were taken from a place survey sponsored by the local government. There have been 1,100 respondents to the survey and he assured members that the results were statistically valid.

Regarding the increase in FOI requests, the policy and performance manager advised that the origin of these requests continued to be balanced between the media, political parties, private individuals and private companies who requested information to sell on the data. This information could be included in future reports. The process had been made slicker and the metric in place was to measure that the 21 day deadline was being met.

A member raised concerns about the indicators performing below target set out in 2.1 particularly the report of “pounds saved through procurement” and the rise in sickness days per quarter.

The policy and performance manager confirmed that these were being addressed by the responsible managers.

Regarding the corporate strategy for 2010-2015 set out in section 5 of the report, the policy and performance manager talked through the proposed objectives and outcomes.

In discussing the report, members asked how potential areas of conflict would be dealt with and how cross-cutting objectives would be scrutinised. For example there may be potential conflicts between protecting the environment and strengthening the economy. There were also concerns about the terminology used in “investing in arts and culture”, suggesting that this implied ongoing financial support rather than seed funding to encourage organisations to be more self-sustaining. It was suggested that “enhancing” or “supporting” would be more appropriate. Finally concerns were raised that many of the outcomes listed were beyond the control of the council. For example “carbon emissions are reduced” or “Cheltenham has improved access and travel options”.

The policy and performance manager indicated that it was up to the overview and scrutiny committees to agree how they wished to scrutinise the objectives within the

corporate strategy. He acknowledged the difficulty in achieving some of the outcomes but these were the priorities that local people had identified and therefore the council needs to reflect on how it can support these. There were ways in which the council could influence these outcomes through its involvement in such issues as land use and business initiatives.

The chair thanked the officer for his report and asked for these comments to be passed on to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: that a performance report be brought back to this committee in six months time to include;

- **basic reasons for milestones below target and deadline changes**
- **a summary of the origin of complaints and any improvement actions taken as a result of a complaint.**

8. BUSINESS CONTINUITY (agenda item 9)

The strategic director introduced his report which had been circulated with the agenda. He indicated that the critical services identified would be the same for other types of emergency and not just swine flu. The list of critical services had been reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team on the 10th of November and the plan was to regularly review it on a six monthly basis.

In response to a question about shared services and how they would impact business continuity plans, the strategic director acknowledged that this was an important area. He confirmed that local authorities in Gloucestershire already had a formal mutual aid agreement in place and the issue of shared services was also being discussed. The movement of resources from one authority to support another authority would depend on the nature of the emergency, for example was it county wide or just specific to one authority. In any emergency the priority would be for this council to address the needs of its local community.

He confirmed that the critical service listed as Public Space Cleansing included waste collection but not necessarily recycling.

9. PARKLIFE (agenda item 10)

The Economic Development Manager introduced Keith Rog and Shaz Siddiqui from ParkLife. In a presentation that followed they would be highlighting the progress made in the first two phases of the project and outlining the plans for the third phase. To date they had received £80,000 of funding from the council and were now looking for continued financial support.

In his presentation Keith Rog described the considerable challenges facing local businesses and the need to manage change and make things happen.

In Phase 3 there were 5 areas of focus for Parklife namely:

- Helping businesses to deal with the recession
- Encouraging businesses to take control and have a sense of ownership and share economies of scale
- Location – maximising the advantages and mitigating any disadvantages of location
- Collaborative working between businesses to share knowledge and experience
- Encouraging businesses to be effective profitable and sustainable

To support this focus Parklife were working on four key initiatives:

- A business development programme
- An environmental management programme
- Redundancy support programme
- Graduate challenge

Shaz Siddiqui explained that the environmental management programme provided a free package of training support and consultancy to local businesses. The programme helped them to reduce business costs through better environmental performance and enabled them to work to meet the demands of their customers regarding environmental standards such as ISO 14001. He confirmed that he worked closely with the low carbon partnership and he acted as a focal point in linking businesses with other such initiatives.

In response to questions from members, Keith Rog said that the Parklife team consisted of four members. As it was relatively small, it relied on the support given by some of the larger businesses. For example Spirax provided mentoring for some of the smaller businesses and other companies ran their local groups.

Another member congratulated Keith Rog on the personal role he had played in resolving the boy racer issue at the Kingsditch estate. He asked how much time Parklife could afford to spend on these apparently more social issues which made a real difference to local people. In response Keith Rog was pleased that he had been able to encourage a partnership approach to resolving the problem. It had become a recognized obstacle to business growth and not just a social problem, particularly in dealing with the litter left after a weekend.

In response to a question about finances, Keith Rog said that the £80,000 contribution from the council had been part of a £0.5 million budget for the first two phases. Although relatively small the council's contribution was very important particularly in supporting his role and that of his colleague Shaz Siddiqui and would allow them to look at expanding their services to other business parks and industrial estates in the Cheltenham area. In terms of sustainability they were encouraging local groups to manage and lead their own teams so that in future Parklife would provide a secretarial role rather than a management one.

Keith Rog acknowledged in his presentation that they had not been as successful as they would have liked in raising their profile during phase 2 of the project. This was a key issue in going forward and it has been agreed that he would work with the council's own communications team to address this. One of the key aims would be to clarify the roles of Parklife and Gloucestershire First.

In response to a member question about recruitment fairs and when they might be reinstated, Keith Rog confirmed that currently there were insufficient job vacancies to make this viable. However he was working closely with businesses to identify their needs and would organise a recruitment fair once there was a sufficient volume of vacancies.

The chair thanked them for an excellent presentation and said that the committee had been impressed by their achievements.

RESOLVED:

(i) That it be recommended to Cabinet:

- i. that Cabinet note that the financial support given to Parklife is well spent in helping a lot of people and businesses to develop and retain employment within the**

area.

- ii. that when the funding comes up for renewal, Cabinet look sympathetically at the request and try to assist the programme in moving forward, and possibly even accelerating it.**

(ii) That this committee receive an update report in 9 months time

10. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

The workplan was noted.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING 25 JANUARY 2009

CHAIRMAN – Councillor Malcolm Stennett