

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 18th November, 2019
6.00 - 8.10 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Chris Mason (Chair), Klara Sudbury (Vice-Chair), Sandra Holliday, John Payne, Paul Baker, Dilys Barrell, Dennis Parsons and Paul McCloskey (Reserve)
Also in attendance:	Councillor Flo Clucas and Councillor Rowena Hay (Cabinet Member Finance), Paul Jones (Executive Director for Finance and Assets), Mark Sheldon (Director of Corporate Projects) Karen Watson (Client Officer)

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors Dobie and Wilkinson had given their apologies. Councillor McCloskey substituted for Councillor Wilkinson.

The Executive Director of People & Change had given his apologies and the Executive Director of Finance & Assets attended in his place.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 21 October 2019 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS, CALLS FOR ACTIONS AND PETITIONS

None were received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

No matters had been referred to the committee.

6. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE

The Strategy and Engagement Manager introduced the update on quarter 2 performance, as circulated with the agenda. He noted that it would look slightly different to previous years since the adoption of the new corporate plan, which was more streamlined with three actions for each of the five priorities, and also highlighted that he had removed the traffic light element and provided a factual summary of progress against each action as we had now entered the pre-

election period known as purdah. Committee members would be aware that the council had purchased a new performance reporting tool called Clearview and this would bring together performance management, risk management and project management. The system was currently under construction, though it was hoped the new system would be available to use by the end of January and the suggestion was that the committee could review Q3 performance, on Clearview, at the February 2020 meeting.

In response to a member question, the Executive Director of Finance & Assets explained that the original target for the council becoming financially self-sufficient had been 2020-21 and that whilst the council was on target to achieve this, this is based on existing financial arrangements with government – he highlighted that the general election now introduces some uncertainty into this plan.

A member expressed some concerns about whether CBC can deliver the priorities in the corporate plan. Whilst he felt it was right that the council be aspirational, he felt concerned about our ability to make Cheltenham the Cyber-Capital of the UK and the revitalisation of the town centre. Questioning whether Cheltenham was in-fact attractive to cyber companies, he noted that there were 19 other cyber security centres in the UK and whilst the town centre was showing improvement, as demonstrated by the next agenda item, the Town Hall was proving difficult to maintain. The Strategy and Engagement Manager was of the view that Cheltenham was an attractive proposition to cyber companies, particularly with GCHQ, a major cyber employer, being based in the town. He went on to acknowledge that the revitalisation of the town centre was critical, but disputed the suggestion that the Town Hall was at all dilapidated, stressing that this building was maintained well by the council and that the discussions around the Town Hall centred on creating a more viable asset which was used and meaningful to a wider number of people than at present.

In response to a member query, the Strategy and Engagement Manager explained that, whilst the council had been awarded £22m to enable infrastructure at West Cheltenham, this would not resolve Junction 10 and whilst Junction 10 was an important part of the equation and GCC were actively lobbying Government, it would cost hundreds of millions to deliver and the cyber park would happen with or without it.

A member voiced concerns that the cyber-park would polarise even more areas of deprivation and affluence. Whilst another member agreed that this was a risk, a third felt that the scheme was key to addressing deprivation in the town and would do so by creating a whole raft of jobs and not just top end jobs. Other members shared their hopes that the University of Gloucestershire would provide cyber related courses and that employers would help educate the towns children. The Strategy and Engagement Manager assured members that having had many discussions about these very issues, the policy framework for inclusive growth would improve deprived areas and benefit local residents.

The Strategy and Engagement Manager acknowledged that the cyber project was a major project, perhaps the biggest ever undertaken, with the potential to generate huge dividends for both the town and the council. Given the level of investment, it was only right and proper that members had questions and the committee were at liberty to request a detailed presentation at any time.

On behalf of the committee, the Chairman thanked the Strategy and Engagement Manger for his attendance and looked forward to seeing a preview of the Clearview system in February.

7. TOWN HALL REDEVELOPMENT - UPDATE

The Director of Corporate Projects introduced the update, as circulated with the agenda and explained that the paper summarised a significant amount of work undertaken by the consultants and project team, to analyse options for the Town Hall. The Town Hall faced a number of issues, amongst them, poor access, ageing technical equipment, lack of capacity (under 1000 which reduced the ability to attract quality performers), a redundant and broken organ which took up capacity, a single bar which resulted in overcrowding, and only 4% of current audiences were aged 18-25.

A number of concepts were tested through public consultation, of which the community arts centre was the most well received and which helped shape the 5 redevelopment options which ranged from £8.8m to £29m, with the potential to generate additional revenue of between circa £88k p.a. to circa £290k p.a. Given the level of capital investment required and the level of funding gaps identified, none of the options were viable and as such a further phased option was considered, to move the redevelopment forward, at a reduced cost overall of £25m compared to the original 5 options. Given the conclusions of the work to date, the options available to the council and TCT included:

1. Do nothing
2. Progress phased development of the Town hall
3. Invest a sum of circa £1m to pump prime the commercial opportunities identified by TCT and request that the council set aside the balance of £0.5m towards funding capital investment in CBC cultural assets following the completion of the development of the Cultural Strategy
4. Build a lightweight café / bar and new entrance structure on the back of the Town Hall
5. (The CBC lead Cabinet Member requested that the following additional option be explored). Set up a free school based on performing arts provision.

The project team concluded that the remaining budget of £1.5m should be used to address some immediate practical barriers to programming and attracting performers. The team were now working with TCT to understand short and medium term requirements, which would support the viability of all Trust buildings and it would be for Cabinet to decide how to use the budget.

The Cabinet Member for Healthy lifestyles acknowledged that there were issues at the Town Hall, not least the fact that it was a listed building which, to an extent limited the options for refurbishment. Also, the challenge of attracting performers that in turn attracted a certain audience (and capacity), and this would become increasingly challenging as time went on. Another issue was that the bar could not operate properly and investment here would allow for significant increases in income and ultimately, without investment, TCT would not be able to increase revenue and would therefore be making annual requests to the council for ongoing support. The Cabinet Member noted the toilets, but explained that the Chief Executive of TCT was confident that there were

commercial temporary toilets available which would solve the issue without the need for major investment at this juncture. She thanked the project team for their hard work, which had been hugely informative and it was now time for decisions to be taken that would enable the Town Hall to carry on as a going-concern.

The Director of Corporate Projects and Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles, gave the following responses to member questions:

- The funding would allow the bar to meet its full potential and generate additional income, but consideration would also be given to solutions in other areas/rooms, which could include 'bottle only' service, in order to maximise income.
- The project team had visited the Battersea Arts Centre which had undergone refurbishment and was now used by a range of people throughout the day. This building was very similar to the Town Hall and the project team felt that with some investment, something similar could be replicated at the Town Hall.
- It was accepted that at present the heritage aspects of the building and town were not being taken advantage of and solutions were being discussed.
- The Asset Management Working Group (AMWG) had raised the suggestion that the building could be sold, but this was a sensitive building in a sensitive location, which made this option a very challenging one. The purpose of the project had been to repurpose for the future, allowing TCT to generate increased income in the short to medium term and then consider longer term options.
- The project team had consulted widely on future use, as well as getting views on the organ, and there was overwhelming support for a multifunctional and multi programmable space. The cost of restoration of the organ could be in the region of £500k, but there were questions about the future appetite for organ music.
- To relocate the organ, which was undoubtedly a sensitive issue, would allow for increased capacity and therefore help with the ongoing viability of the Town Hall. The cost of relocation would be in the region of £435k, though this would incorporate stage work, however, it was noted that this was not considered to be a priority at this stage.
- The consequence of any proposed sale of the Town hall would be considered further once this had been explored further.
- Programming was an issue and TCT were looking at altering this in order to attract a younger audience.
- Acoustics were an issue, but were not considered to be an immediate priority, as there were more pressing issues to be resolved. The introduction of retractable tiered seating was considered more important.

A member, who was also a member of the AMWG, acknowledged that the council owned some very beautiful buildings, but stressed the expense of maintaining them and the council's inability to meet the cost of modernising the building as required. Whilst he commended the commitment the council were demonstrating to breathe life back into this building, he questioned whether the

level of investment being made would result in any reduction of ongoing costs to the council and therefore advocated looking at the option for sale.

A number of members voiced their support for the continued preservation of the Town Hall but also acknowledged that, given limited resources, the ongoing viability of this building posed a major challenge to the council and TCT.

The Chair concluded that the project team's recommended option 3 was the most sensible and thanked the Director of Corporate Projects and the Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles for their attendance.

8. THIRD SECTOR RENT SUPPORT GRANT - ONE PAGE STRATEGY

The Chairman reminded members that at the last meeting, the committee had agreed to establish a task group to review the current Third Sector Rent Support Grant policy. A draft one page strategy, as well as the current policy had been circulated with the agenda and members were asked to consider the outcomes for approval. The Cabinet Member Finance asked that an outcome be added in reference to consideration to the current level of support (£200k) and members agreed the revised outcomes.

The Democracy Officer confirmed that she would update the one page strategy, before emailing all non-executive members to invite them to be involved in the review, before setting the first meeting.

9. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED

The Chairman confirmed that there had been no meeting of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee since the last meeting of this committee.

Councillor McCloskey had provided an update on the recent meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (30 October) and this had been circulated by email to members, in advance of the meeting. Whilst members had no questions on the update that had been circulated, the Chairman did question the value of such updates coming to the O&S Committee, suggesting that perhaps they would be better circulated as a briefing to all members. A member reminded the committee that the agendas and minutes of meetings of these GCC groups were all available on the GCC website and whilst she did not see any value in representatives replicating an entire agenda, she did feel the updates were a useful means of flagging matters of potential interest and importance. The Chairs group would consider this further when they next met.

No update had been received from Councillor Brownsteen on the 12 November meeting of the Police and Crime Panel.

10. CABINET BRIEFING

The Chairman explained that there had been nothing specific that the Leader had needed to provide an update on and in the Leaders absence, invited members to put any questions to the Cabinet Member Finance. There were no questions.

11. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

As Chair of the group, Councillor Parsons provided a verbal update to the committee on the work of the Events Task Group. He explained that the group

had held one of the four planned meetings, which had focussed on strategy and included Jess Goodwin and David Jackson from Marketing Cheltenham and Andrew Knott from finance. Officers outlined the overall commercial strategy, which was based on making better use of council assets and seeking to improve their commercial potential. The strategy looked to stretch the peak season by improving troughs in the schedule and Officers agreed to produce a schedule, which included financials and would clearly identify peaks and troughs, for consideration at the next meeting. At this meeting members had emphasised the need to strike a balance between generating profit and enabling free access for residents and visitors.

The next meeting was scheduled for the 27 November and the focus would be 'Process' and included Jane Stovell, Jess Goodwin, Louis Krog and Adam Reynolds.

The third meeting was scheduled for the 6 December and would focus on previous events, and include input from various stakeholders.

It was noted that the schedule of meetings had been impacted by the general election and as such, meetings of the group would now run into the new-year.

The Chairman also noted that Councillor Baker had chosen to stand down from the group and Councillor Sudbury has asked that Councillor Barnes, as her fellow ward councillor, attend any meetings that she was not able to attend.

A further update would be provided at the next meeting.

12. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The scrutiny work plan had been circulated with the agenda.

The Chair noted that the scrutiny review feedback session has been deferred until the January meeting because the Executive Director of People & Change was not available to attend this meeting.

A member asked that Stagecoach be invited back and the Chair agreed that this request would be considered further by the Chairs group.

13. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT INFORMATION

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining agenda items as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraph 3, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

Paragraph 3; Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular Person (including the authority holding that information)

14. EXEMPT MINUTES

The exempt minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the exempt minutes of the meeting held on the 21 October 2019, be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

15. FUTURE STRATEGIC WASTE SITE RELOCATION PROJECT

The committee considered an update on the future strategic waste site relocation project.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for the 13 January 2020.

Chris Mason
Chairman