

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 6th June, 2022

6.00 - 7.10 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	John Payne (Chair), Steve Harvey (Vice-Chair), Graham Beale, Jackie Chelin, Stephan Fifield, Louis Savage, Julian Tooke, Suzanne Williams and Glenn Andrews (Reserve)
Also in attendance:	Bev Thomas, Darren Knight, Sanjay Mistry, Mike Redman, Laura Tapping and Alex Wells

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Britter and Holliday.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Minutes of the last meeting were approved by those Members who attended, and signed as a true record.

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

There were none.

5. CABINET BRIEFING

Councillor Jeffries (Deputy Leader) was in attendance to take any questions on behalf of the Leader. There were none.

6. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

There were none.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW

Laura Tapping, Climate Emergency Programme Officer, gave a short presentation outlining the council's climate emergency plan, as set out in the discussion paper circulated to Members, and highlighting what needs to be done for Cheltenham to become a net zero council and borough by 2030. She acknowledged that there would be many challenges, that communities and individuals, as well as the council itself, would need to change their behaviour, and that a bigger team and budget would be needed to fulfil all the actions set out in the pathway published last year.

In response to Member questions, officers confirmed that:

- with regard to the selling of council assets to save carbon emissions, a huge range of things contributed to carbon emissions, and that every

service needed to review what it was doing and how, every decision needed detailed consideration of its carbon impact in order to bring about any reduction, and climate change must be the lens through which everything the council does is looked at to reach targets. New technology and the way the government is looking at the problem should help local authorities to take action. Asked whether the team was looking at hypo-situations, such as the council's move from the Municipal Offices or analysis of the energy efficiency of its services, Alex Wells, Energy Officer, confirmed that part of the reason why her role had been created was to work with the property team, and ensure that energy efficiency is always considered when looking at the property portfolio;

- as a brief explanation of heat transfer, a heat network could connect a number of buildings where excess and waste heat is produced – such as the cloud of steam over the testing facilities at Spirax Sarco – and look for ways to use this to heat other buildings. This was part of government strategy and a number of potential opportunities had been identified;
- the 'missing link' between the work of the climate emergency team and the council's green space team had recently been identified, and some baseline surveys of land would be created to understand biodiversity and where improvements could be made, such as by reducing mowing activities. Officer resource would need to be found for this. The recently-published SPD included a whole section about biodiversity, encouraging homeowners and developers to consider the green spaces around them when taking any actions;
- improving bus services was a big aim of the team, in addition to encouraging people to walk or cycle; GCC was responsible for bus provision, and there had been little scrutiny of the service, but officers hoped pressure would be put on bus companies to improve;
- the remit of the climate emergency team was to offer guidance to CBC departments rather than implement works - the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) set out actions for the team, though in some cases this simply meant designing and putting together a business case for a project. The team worked closely with other departments to help make things happen, and was currently undergoing analysis of its role and how best to get its message across to all council departments. Through the socio-environmental impact tool, they would look at the potential social and environmental impacts of any project the council is hoping to deliver, and work alongside all departments to make sure projects were as environmentally friendly as possible.
- regarding the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and in light of a recently refused planning application for 350 houses with no climate consideration, a statement was being developed, and it would be going to council for approval on 20th June, then publicised as widely as possible. The Planning team would undergo training to use and apply the SPD; the challenge would be in getting it embedded in the planning system and getting developers to use it.
- this was a problem nationally, with the national planning framework not keeping pace with the need for reduction of carbon emissions. Mike Redman, Director of Environment, emphasised the need for local authorities to work collectively and lobby government, and to make the SPD enforceable as policy. It was only intended to be an interim measure until national policy caught up;

- the team was already working on business cases for council buildings, such as variable speed drives at Leisure@, which would contribute to the climate target and achieve £50k saving a year for 15 years. Getting the prep right and funding in place would provide the data to take work forward;
- the CEAP remained a work in progress, taking into account public awareness, technological changes, availability of grants etc. The Director of Environment added that he sat on a climate leadership group, together with Cabinet Members from district councils, key partners, and GCC. GCC was increasingly aware of the role it needs to play, and key areas where it could have an impact – notably transport which was currently responsible for one third of all carbon emissions. The work was hugely challenging and would require lifestyle changes, which would bring additional benefits. Going forward, the county would be on board, and CBC would work alongside them, but some of the messaging would not be easy, and everyone had a role to play. The role of councillors was to explain why the proposed changes were so mission critical to the long-term health of the plant;
- in view of the complex and expensive nature of the messaging, the majority of the public did not understand how much work was going on behind the scenes, and it wouldn't be reasonable to ask people to do things the council itself wouldn't do, so communicating this message and emphasising how we could all work together to improve matters would be key. Laura Tapping confirmed that a county-wide climate co-ordinator was in post, and was proving successful in communicating between districts. Alex Wells added that technology was moving apace with brilliant new innovations – such as solar window film suitable for listed buildings – that Cheltenham would continue to seek out and implement, thus leading by example.

The Chair invited the new Cabinet Member Climate Emergency to say a few words. She thanked everyone for their congratulations on her new role, the scope and opportunities of which were enormous. Of all the portfolios, she considered hers has the biggest potential impact but also faces the biggest challenges. She praised the great team of very supportive officers, and looking forward to getting on with the job.

The Chair thanked the team for attending the meeting and giving an insight into this long-running process. He looked forward to monitoring the progress of its work going forward.

8. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW (2020) - FOLLOW UP

Darren Knight, Executive Director People and Change, explained for the benefit of new Members that in 2019, a company specialising in good governance was employed to review the way Overview & Scrutiny worked. It made a number of recommendations which had been implemented over the last two years, making the committee more effective, ensuring good reports, good questions and answers, and diverse agenda items. Members could further improve their effectiveness, for example through training.

There were no Member questions.

9. DIGITAL PLATFORM IMPLEMENTATION AND CUSTOMER ACCESS

Darren Knight, Executive Director Place and Change, told Members that process-mapping across the council had been carried out to analyse various processes and transactions, and the data used to create a business case to invest in new customer technology which would improve customer service, allow more flexibility, ensure efficiency, and make savings. This included working with Stroud District Council, and joint procurement of the software system Netcall, which was used by one in four local authorities. He added that the plan was to start decommissioning one system – booking a bulky waste collection – in August, and would ultimately result of greater flexibility in deploying resources and better data to plan, forecast and manage demand across the council.

He emphasised that the extension of the digital platform would not exclude face-to-face meetings, but would ultimately allow officers to respond, manage and track enquiries in a more efficient way.

Sanjay Mistry, Programme Manager, added that using the technology when redesigning processes would ensure that they deliver the expected benefits, and would also improve the authority's self-sufficiency. Instead of being beholden to software suppliers, it could develop its own abilities and maximise opportunities, making it as efficient as possible and ensuring maximum return on investments. The system was bought in December, and after 12 weeks of training and implementation, the council was close to delivering the first development process which would allow it to delete the existing platform. CBC was one of three councils (together with Tewkesbury and Stroud) in the county using the technology, and would work in close partnership with the others, to share learnings and development and accelerate the roll-out. Darren Knight confirmed that this meant more could be done in-house, led by Sanjay and his team of analysts, who were experts in process mapping and process redesign.

Members thanked the officers for an interesting and detailed report. In response to Member questions, officers stated that:

- cyber security and risk were not included in the report but, having seen the impact on other councils, were at the forefront of all thinking. Officers would be happy to pick this up offline or in exempt session, and go through all the details in terms of monitoring and how the council would react if there was an issue and it couldn't use technology for a period of time;
- to ensure the design not only looked good and provided flows and utility needs but was actually intuitive and engaging for real users, the plan was to set up a resident group which would come and test the technology in an observational setting, so any frustrations with the system could be corrected. The group would be as diverse as possible;
- once a process was set up and running, it would always need ongoing maintenance and review, and officers were working to build the capacity and capability of the team to ensure this, and they were currently advertising for a business analyst. To ensure continuous improvement as technology moves forwards, the team would work closely with service managers, keep track on latest developments in technology, and keep looking for opportunities to refine and improve the processes;

- Engage software was an insightful and intuitive system which would be used to map any changes in the process, model the impact of any change with regard to cost and efficiency;

The Chair added that the council had clearly invested heavily in Netcall, justified in the report by the resultant single resident record and 'one stop shop' experience for residents. He wondered whether the new system integrated with Clearview, now or in the future, which currently monitors all aspects of the council's work. Darren Knight said that these two systems were not integrated - priority at the moment was integration with Yotta, the in-cab technology system used by UBICO – but at some point in the future the data from Netcall call would be fed into Clearview to update performance indicators. Sanjay Mistry added that the single customer record was pivotal, and the council was looking to launch a self-service portal whereby customers can monitor their own interaction with the council at any time to suit them. The Revenues and Benefits team carried out a successful update a couple of years ago, using Netcall as a gateway to the website. Officers confirmed that the system had inbuilt GDPR compliance, and anyone could remove themselves at any time.

The Chair thanked officers for their input.

10. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED

Councillor McCloskey's report had been circulated. He pointed out to Members that, in view of the large council tax contribution the county received from CBC, it was fundamentally important that borough councillors and officers knew what was happening at the county level. He was be happy to take questions or be contacted separately.

Members thanked him for his helpful report.

11. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Chair explained for new Members that this was a standing item on the agenda and could be reviewed at leisure. The workplan set out what it was felt should be considered at the next meeting, but was not set in stone. Members were welcome to email him or Democratic Services to make changes.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

4th July 2022.

13. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT INFORMATION

Members resolved to move into exempt session.

14. END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Darren Knight, Executive Director People and Change, introduced his report and invited Members to consider whether they wanted further information. The Chair suggested debating this at the Chairs' meeting, and taking it forward from there, if Members were comfortable with that.

15. EXEMPT MINUTES

The exempt minutes of the previous meeting were approved by those Members who attended, and signed as a true record.

John Payne
Chairman