

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 5th September, 2022

6.00 - 8.00 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	John Payne (Chair), Graham Beale, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Stephan Fifield, Tabi Joy, Louis Savage and Julian Tooke
Also in attendance:	Harry Mayo, Judith Baker, Darren Knight, Councillor Victoria Atherstone, Louis Krog, Bernadette Reed, Martin Stacy and Councillor Rowena Hay

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs. Williams and Harvey.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the 4th July meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

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

There were none.

5. CABINET BRIEFING

The Leader shared the following information with Members:

- the corporate plan is still a work in progress, due to be launched early next year. Members will see it in good time to add their input, and it will be brought to Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) in due course;
- some Members will remember a residents' survey carried out a few years ago; another survey is about to be launched, with cross referencing to show trends. A sample of 1500 people will be involved, via direct mail, on line and via telephone. The results will be brought to Council, Cabinet, and to O&S in due course;
- from next month, public sector bodies will have to comply with accessibility regulations which require published documents to meet the needs of all users, including people with impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments or learning disabilities. Democratic Services are working on updating standard templates for Council and Cabinet reports and Modern.Gov webpages, and towards producing accessible versions of agenda, decision and minute templates, all as part of wider project to make

websites and other digital services accessible to all customers. The changes to reports will be largely formatting issues (tables, borders), with the structure retained but laid out differently and the risk assessment streamlined. Officers are being trained on how to deliver accessible documents.

In response to questions from Members, the Leader confirmed:

- that the use of colour in reports and documents caused accessibility problems for some users and also needed to be addressed;
- that documents and reports sometimes have to include formal statutory language but the use of simple words, avoidance of acronyms, and inclusion of a glossary are all important ways to help ensure that reports were as easy to understand as possible for everyone.

6. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

The Chair reported that Council on 18 July referred matter to O&S, regarding UNICEF Child Friendly status. In response, a discussion paper is scheduled to come to 31st October meeting, written by Richard Gibson, Head of Communities, Well-Being and Partnerships.

7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The annual report of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had been circulated, and he thanked Members for the opportunity to attend the meeting to discuss it and answer questions. He highlighted the following:

- the focus on strengthening the constabulary to be stronger, bigger and better- resourced. 200 extra police have been recruited in the last year, working towards the manifesto target of 300;
- the focus on dealing with anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood crime, which dropped by 59% in last year;
- from the government's Safer Streets initiative, two successful bids totalling £3m have been awarded, to help tackle anti-social behaviour, violence against women and girls, and rural crime. This makes Gloucestershire the second most successful force out of 43 in that bidding process, and although not the most dangerous county in the country, there are definite crime hotspots in Cheltenham, Gloucester and elsewhere, which justify this government funding;
- after a difficult first year balancing the budget, and an overspend of £1.4m last May, projected to go up to £10m over four years, the last financial year has produced an underspend of a few million which can be put to use in growing the constabulary, and for emergency IT infrastructure, which is desperately needed within the force;
- the constabulary has been in 'special measures' since 2021 when HM Inspectorate found it to be inadequate in five key areas: investigating crime, supporting victims, recording data about crime, responding to the public, protecting vulnerable people and good use of resources. This is a serious situation, and the PCC is working hard with the chief constable and the force to improve matters as soon as possible.

In response to questions from Members, the PCC stated that:

- resident concern about policing levels during race week is taken seriously, and although the festival as a whole is well run, anti-social behaviour and

street safety has always been a problem. A stakeholders' meeting was held recently, involving the PCC, police, county council, borough council and race course, to discuss what more could be done. At the moment, about 100 officers provide security inside and outside the grounds; the festival organisers don't provide any financial support for policing outside the grounds, and it is up to the Chief Constable to make operational decisions as to where officers are deployed. Bringing in more support from outside the force would incur cost, or result in fewer officers to deal with issues elsewhere. In view of its huge commercial advantage, he feels the Jockey Club should do more, providing more marshals, supported by police, particularly on the main route between the town and racecourse, and this is his focus at the moment;

- it is true that law and order is a matter for the police, but officers would be on hand to support Jockey Club marshals when necessary. It is all a question of balancing resources;
- the legal situation is that event organisers do not pay for policing outside the event grounds, which is why encouraging the Jockey Club to pay for additional marshals seems a suitable solution. If they refuse, he would be minded to lobby for a change to the law requiring big event organisers to pay for police outside the grounds;
- he is also aware of harassment of serving and hospitality staff during race week, and covert officers are deployed, in particular to target people being aggressive towards women. In addition, action can be taken by the licensing authority if rules are not being followed;
- these discussions can be continued outside the meeting, as he has great sympathies with anyone trying to protect the interests of their community;
- it is important not to think that the force is failing, despite being in 'special measures' - the Inspectorate described it as 'good' in four categories - but a good way to get to grips with improving the areas described as inadequate was to reach out to other forces which are doing better in those areas. Six forces, including Durham and Avon and Somerset, have been visited in the last year, to pick up detailed information based on their experience and practices;
- road safety is a particular passion, and encouraging a county-wide strategy through a new approach with GCC is important. Any attempt to reduce speed limits will usually bounce against Gloucestershire Highways saying a reduction from 30 to 20 mph won't work unless traffic calming measures are introduced and will not be popular with the police. A number of firms offer low-cost, low-tech speed cameras which definitely have the potential to improve road safety. Getting people to think differently is a slow process, but if suitable stretches of road can be identified and, with the agreement of GCC and the police, a number of the low-cost cameras installed, it could help bring about a behavioural change. The cameras clock the speeding vehicle, send information to the police, the police send warning letters, with enforcement and fines deployed if the speeding continues. He hopes that this more pragmatic, affordable, quick and simple approach could work, with pilots in different areas;
- anyone caught speeding via the speed cameras, who has not done so in the previous three years, is offered a course to refresh their knowledge of the Highway Code, rather than receive points on their licence straight away. This is the normal procedure, and generally works well;
- he is aware of the growing problem of bike theft and subsequent re-sale on eBay, and is talking to the constabulary about developing a protocol for

dealing with this, to consider how the police work out their lines of enquiry, and look at new ways to upload information. As usual, finding the resources is a problem, but bike theft could be better handled;

- hare coursing is a dreadful crime, involving many cross-border criminals, and Gloucestershire is working other forces in the south-west to tackle it. A new fleet of drones and high-performance equipment, together with excellent WhatsApp groups, are helping, as well as strengthening the constabulary and specials to fight crime in local communities;
- fly-tipping is a recognised problem, usually the responsibility of the local authority; the police generally defer to them, but if fly-tippers are caught in the act, the police will get involved. There are mechanisms to deal with the issue, including neighbourhood police, or an email direct to the PCC, who will then pass it to the appropriate body;
- the target for 101 call wait time is two minutes, the average is eight minutes, but unfortunately sometimes people are waiting as long as 30-40 minutes for a response. Better telephony could help – advising people where they are in a queue, for example – and more call handlers in the force control room. Unfortunately, the same call handlers deal with 101 and 999 calls, so callers often drop off a 101 call when they fail to get a response and call 999 instead, so creating a vicious circle;
- concerning low-level ASB, CBC's SOLACE team works well – the best in the county - and is set to improve with the Community Trigger, which is activated when three ASB incidents are reported in three months, to review the case and ensure best practice.

The Chair thanked the PCC for his report and honest responses.

8. CBH RESPONSIVE REPAIRS SERVICE

Emma Wall (CBH Executive Director Property & Communities) introduced the paper, highlighting the need for CBH's responsive repairs service to be of the highest quality. Their two key goals were a high level of resident satisfaction and value for money. She acknowledged that lockdown restrictions had had a significant impact on the delivery of repairs in tenants' homes, as well as on the residents themselves, and CBH was grateful for the patience residents had showed throughout the pandemic.

The report also set out CBH's response to the pandemic, and she was pleased to say that the benchmarking of its performance over that period found it to be in quartile 1 and quartile 2, while residents' satisfaction had increased in the last few months. The paper also set out the change programme that CBH commenced in August 2021, ensuring that it continued to invest in the service to make sure it remained fit for purpose.

In response to Members' questions, the following responses were given:

- tenants were surveyed in two ways, both in a transactional survey after the completion of each repair (which had a 90% satisfaction rate) and in quarterly acuity surveys carried out by an independent organisation (which had a satisfaction rate between 78% and 81%). Their aim was to get this higher, but for now it compared favourably to other housing organisations;

- in terms of employee recruitment, CBH was looking to 'grow their own' wherever possible by giving employees opportunities to take the next step up. They were also working with local colleges to bring young people through the apprenticeship route;
- in terms of employee retention, CBH tended to lose relatively few members of staff to competitors, as it offered good hours, flexible working and benefits that were not typical for the trade;
- the total number of repairs per property (on average just under three per year) was slightly below to the average for the industry. They tried to do as much as possible in one visit to avoid excessive travel and labour time.

The Chair thanked Emma for her paper and responses to Member questions, and praised CBH for its fine work with the council.

9. SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER

Emma Wall (CBH Executive Director Property & Communities) presented her paper, which sets out the progress made towards delivering on the framework set out in the government white paper, published in 2020. No legislation was included in the white paper, but as legislation is brought forward by government in response to regulatory requirements and any consultation, it is CBH and CBC's role to respond in a prompt and efficient way to ensure that all requirements are being met. The outcome of two self-assessment activities are complete and included in the paper, demonstrating a positive direction of travel. Key deliverables for the next 12 months are also set out, to ensure the requirements of the white paper continue to be met.

In response to Members' questions, the following responses were given:

- the white paper was a reaction to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and the government had taken forward two main bills – the Fire Safety Act and the Building Safety Act, which include wide-ranging building regulatory reform involving significant changes to the way buildings are managed. Buildings are categorised as higher and lower risk, and Cheltenham is fortunate in having only lower risk buildings – no high-rise towers – although reasonable precautions and various measures and actions are still required for low-risk buildings. These are reported through the audit risk committee, which reports progress towards meeting the requirements to CBC on a monthly basis;
- CBH is working with ward councillors and CBC to address residents' concerns about the standard of some social housing in mixed residential areas in Benhall and The Reddings ward, the potential fire risk they pose, and the lack of any communication on the subject since last year. The longevity of some pre-fab buildings – intended to last for 20 years, now 70 years old – is an issue, and work is being carried out in the background at present, to be reported soon, to move the project forward and ensure tenants can live in homes of which they can be proud. Some of the homes aren't as energy-efficient as they could be and CBH doesn't want tenants living in these conditions;
- the white paper puts residents and their welfare at the centre, and CBH and CBC are in the fortunate position of delivering housing in the community for the community, unlike housing associations which may manage 30k houses

- across several counties. Tenants are involved on the board, are part of a strong scrutiny panel, and help make the right decisions for other tenants;
- the biggest challenge is still around culture, and the ability of colleagues to empathise, understand, and really hear what tenants are saying, but CBH will continue to listen and act to ensure the best service possible for its tenants;
 - regarding when the legislation associated with the white paper might come into being, some acts are already in place (building safety, fire safety); the housing ombudsman has introduced a number of changes to which housing authorities must quickly respond; and other legislation (such as smoke and carbon monoxide detectors) is taking its time due to the distractions of the last six months but will be coming forward in the next 12-24 months. Other legislation is further down the line, and will not materialise for 7-8 years.

The Chair thanked Emma for her presentation, and proposed inviting her back in 12-18 months' time to report on progress.

10. AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND GENERAL UPDATE

Louis Krog (Head of Public Protection and DEPLO) introduced the paper, explaining that Cheltenham used to have a borough-wide Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) until it became clear through extensive monitoring that most of the borough was complying with statutory limits, and it was only specific areas that exceeded them. The AQMA was reduced to incorporate this smaller area, which meant the previous Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) became obsolete and a new one was needed. A draft had been published in December 2020 with the approval of DEFRA, and although there was a statutory requirement to finalise the action plan within twelve months of its creation, this was changed to two years due to Covid, and the deadline was now September 2022. He was working closely with the Cabinet Member, Cllr. Horwood, and felt it was close to being ready to go out for consultation. He added that a number of relevant topic areas did not sit with CBC, as the county council and Highways in particular were responsible for traffic and transport. He also noted that as vehicles became cleaner over time, there was a sense that the government was shifting its focus towards particulate emissions. There were control zones in Cheltenham where the burning of things like firewood was restricted, but these needed updating.

In response to Members' questions, the following responses were given:

- 35 areas across the borough were currently being monitored, and this would be expanded going forward subject to further discussions;
- they were currently using mesh tubes to measure emissions and particulates, but were looking to procure more specialised equipment too;
- the data they were currently gathering was reasonably comprehensive, and gave a clear overview of air pollution in the monitored areas;
- the new Transport Hub being built at Arle Court would be a reasonable place for additional monitoring, and concerns from residents about it being a pollution hotspot due to increased vehicular activity were being taken into account;

- the draft action plan addressed other relevant policy areas and projects like the airport and Golden Valley, in order to ensure they were sustainable and green;
- it was clearly key to collaborate with projects like West Cheltenham and get ahead of the game rather than having to retrospectively implement enforcement measures;
- officers were fairly confident that the county council were on the same wavelength with regard to reducing emissions, both from a public health and a highways point of view, though GCC would also have to get the other district councils on board. There was already a strong existing partnership between CBC and GCC;
- public transport was a key part of reducing emissions, and officers were aware of complaints from residents about the effects of outsourcing and cuts on this;
- the action plan aimed to lower the limit from the statutory 40 µg/m³ to 30 µg/m³, which was likely to expand the AQMA;
- the team was working closely with climate change officers to ensure their goals were aligned. The Executive Director Place and Communities added that both teams, as well as other departments such as parks and gardens, were all under the same umbrella and he would ensure they pulled in the same direction.

11. 2021/22 ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair said he had no responsibility for the content of this excellent report, which all fell under the chairmanship of his predecessor, Cllr. Chris Mason. Cllr. Mason was due all the credit for the progress of O&S, the variety of issues covered, and the engagement with organisation providers. It was the role of O&S to be a critical friend and to challenge, and he hoped he and the present committee could continue with this process.

12. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED

The updates from other scrutiny meetings were taken as read.

13. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

The update from the Scrutiny Task Group on Tackling Multiple deprivation was taken as read. The Democracy Officer added that since the note had been circulated, a meeting had taken place on 31st August with a range of representatives from community organisations. The group was due to next meet on 4th October.

14. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

There were no comments on the scrutiny workplan.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

3rd October.

16. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT INFORMATION

Members resolved to move into exempt session.

17. COUNTER FRAUD UNIT PARTNERSHIP

Emma Cathcart, Head of Service, Counter-Fraud and Enforcement Unit (CFEU) presented her report and responded to Members' questions.

John Payne
Chairman