

Cheltenham Borough Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 26 February 2024

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.30 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Steve Harvey (Vice-Chair), Graham Beale, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Emma Nelson, Smith, Julian Tooke and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Helen Mole (Head of Place Marketing and Inward Investment) and Claire Hughes (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Joy and Fifield.

Councillor Harvey took the Chair.

2 Declarations of interest

Councillor Nelson declared an interest in agenda item 9, in relation to the Police and Crime Panel.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

An amendment was proposed under agenda item 5, Cabinet Briefing, to explain that the agents were assisting the council with the sale of the municipal building. The amendment was accepted.

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January were then 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 stated that as she had provided Members with a full briefing at Council on 24th February, there was no further update.

In response to a question with regard to the planting of flowering trees as part of the Minster project, the Leader confirmed that there were no plans for further planting, due to the fact that there were a large number of unmarked graves. She remarked that there are already a number of trees in the area which do flower in the springtime.

6 Matters referred to committee

There were no matters referred to the committee for this meeting.

7 Tourism and Town Marketing Provision

The Chair opened the item by giving his thanks to the Cabinet Member Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing as it was the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting that he would be attending prior to the elections in May when he will be standing down.

The Head of Place Marketing and Inward Investment explained that her department is responsible for the following:

- Destination management and marketing to support the visitor economy.
- Events – both delivery and support for external organisers.
- Inward investment and the promotion of Cheltenham as a place to do business.
- Commercial income generation
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme management.

The published report focused on the first point.

It was explained to the committee that travel and tourism is hugely important to the economy, worth an estimated £237 billion to GDP. Cheltenham welcomed approximately 2 million visitors in 2022 which supports around 4% of all employment in the town and many businesses.

As travel and tourism is such a competitive business, exciting promotional campaigns are a powerful way to persuade visitors to choose Cheltenham.

Within the seasonal campaigns, the team follow the objectives listed below:

- Communicating what is on and where to go – attracting visitors and residents.
- Working with local business partners – especially businesses in the visitor economy.

- Presenting a positive image of Cheltenham.
- Encouraging people to stay within the area for longer and engage in multiple activities whilst here.

There is also year round marketing activity which includes: daily posts and engagement on social media, a fortnightly newsletter, the Visit Cheltenham website, the printed town guide and printed posters in town.

Destination or place management is the 'behind the scenes' work of the team. It contributes to the public perception and experience of the town and looks at the overall visitor experience.

The team are looking at ways to provide a Tourist Information service. The details of which are set out in the report. Success of the team is measured against organisational performance, for example, social media followers or website visitors. Details of the outcomes are in the report.

The Head of Place Marketing and Inward Investment explained that each year the council commissions an independent assessment of the volume and value of tourism and the impact of visitor expenditure on the local economy. Year-on-year comparison figures are a fairly reliable indicator of the current position of the sector. Data for 2023 will be available in November.

While the figures look at first glance to be outstanding – and this is of course a good thing – these figures have to be seen in the context of the recovery from the impacts of the covid pandemic. Visitor numbers had not quite recovered nationally by 2022 and Cheltenham is broadly in line with national figures.

The following points were made:

- KPIs should reflect attracting people to move to the town. The officer confirmed that this one of the KPI's for the wider team and were not included in the report.
- The officer acknowledged that there was a blossoming relationship between marketing Cheltenham and twinning but there was potential for more.
- The marketing Cheltenham newsletter was sent to people who sign up for it on the website and customers who had purchased ice rink tickets were given the opportunity to opt in.
- The static signs that are in the town centre, Bath Road, the Brewery and Montpellier are all being renewed, these are the maps in the metal signs as other signs are the responsibility of the County Council.
- The wheel which is currently in Imperial Gardens, is operated by the Cheltenham BID; information on revenue from this was currently not available.
- The Minster Exchange (MX) was highlighted as a place to host some form of tourism information. When CBC leave the Municipal Offices there will be tourist information in the public area of its new home.

- Recognising that not all people have access to digital technology, the officer explained that there is a balancing act between printed media and online media due to the carbon footprint and cost. However, 70,000 printed town guides are printed and reprinted if required.
- A Member highlighted that the younger generation will only use digital when looking for information and at some point the old ways might have to be sacrificed. The officer confirmed that her team were undertaking training on Artificial Intelligence.

The Cabinet Member Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing addressed the committee and acknowledged that the format of information provision was a key issue. He recognised that digital was not the default for all and printed media is still distributed. The previous Tourist Information Centre, and latterly the pods, have only attracted a handful of visitors and they have been mainly residents and there needed to be a way to attract both residents and visitors alike. The Cabinet Member wished to bring Members' attention to the reduction in the carbon footprint of the Christmas ice rink compared to the previous year.

When asked how day visits to the town are monitored, the officer explained that this was currently not available, but it was down as a priority to look into.

The Cabinet Member Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing commented that he had recently been present at a well-attended event with social media followers who in tagging the event would have reached out to a large audience.

With regard to a question on UKSPF funding, the officer explained that this was council wide and not limited to tourism. The Cabinet Member Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing stated that when the country left the EU the UKSPF was the funding promised by the government, although this represented only one third of the amount promised.

The Chair thanked the Head of Place Marketing and Inward Investment and the Cabinet Member for their welcome contributions.

8 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer introduced the report and stated that this represented a draft work plan for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I). In producing this document there is due regard to the Equalities Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

She explained an officer ED&I working group has been set up and it will include Member appointed Equality Champions in due course.

She explained that the current process for equality impact assessments in the decision making process will change. It will become a two stage process to include an initial questionnaire followed up by a more detailed analysis where required. This would mean that there would be a response for every report.

Members who had already provided feedback on the draft were thanked and further comments were invited by the end of March.

As former Mayor, the Chair commented that when in office he had an ED & I advisor and was the first Mayor in the country to do so.

The following points were raised :

- A budget should be made available for this work
- Consideration should be given on how to encourage people to engage
- encourage mandatory training completion, particularly by Members
- It was recognised that those organisations that embrace diversity can be more challenging and more creative and thus perform better.
- Include an acknowledgement of neurodiversity in the workplace

The Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer thanked Members for their input and welcomed further feedback.

9 Feedback from other scrutiny meetings attended

The Chair noted that, at its last meeting, the Police and Crime panel did not receive the budget figures.

Members thanked the representatives for their hard work and their reports.

10 Updates from scrutiny task groups

The Chair of the Scrutiny Task Group (STG), Cllr Nelson updated the committee. It had now met a few times and a current CBH tenant board member was a member of the group. She reported that the interim housing transformation director had addressed the group at the last meeting and Members felt that the transition is in very safe hands having heard his background and experience.

The Chair noted that some staff were feeling nervous about the TUPE process and the STG felt that they need to be nurtured. They are hoping to raise this at the next meeting however they have been told to concentrate on the transition.

The Leader stated that things had moved fast since the scrutiny task group last met. The CBH Chief Executive and 3 other senior members had now left the organisation. Gareth Edmundson had been appointed as acting Chief Executive along with a dual role for Paul Jones and Paul Minnis. Together with the Leader, they were working hard on staff morale, and she was 'meeting and greeting' staff when they arrived at the Municipal Offices.

The Leader referred to the tenant and leaseholder consultation which had now been completed. There were 682 respondents (over 10%) with the majority understanding why the CBH service was taken back in house. The majority of respondents also stated that they would prefer a mix of digital and face to face communication. The

red areas that attracted concern with the respondents were anti-social behaviour, complaints and neighbourhood safety. Feedback was received from tenants, leaseholders and shared ownership customers which was a good representation. The majority of the feedback is supportive and people have an understanding of the process that is in place.

She ended by thanking tenants and leaseholders for responding to the consultation and Campbell Tickell for their comprehensive report.

11 Review of scrutiny workplan

This was noted.

12 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as the 25th March.

13 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT INFORMATION

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

RESOLVED THAT

The Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January were approved and signed as a correct record.