

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 3rd March, 2014

6.00 - 8.30 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Barbara Driver (Chair), Klara Sudbury (Vice-Chair), Andrew Chard, Nigel Britter, Helena McCloskey, Chris Ryder, Charles Stewart, Garth Barnes (Reserve) and Rob Reid (Reserve)
Also in attendance:	Councillor Ian Bickerton, Councillor Penny Hall, Councillor Jon Walklett, Councillor Roger Whyborn and Councillor Chris Coleman

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Colin Hay and Sandra Holliday. Councillors Garth Barnes and Rob Reid attended the meeting as substitutes.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Chris Ryder declared an interest in Agenda Item 11 b) as President of the Cheltenham and District Allotment Holders Association.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2014 were agreed subject to the following amendments.

Re Agenda Item 13 (page 5): the second and fourth paragraphs are removed and the second paragraph of the amended minutes should read "Councillor Rob Garnham, chair of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, explained that the group had considered the budget proposals in depth with a view to determine whether the council was doing as it said it would do..".

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

None received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

None received.

6. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED

Councillor Penny Hall provided feedback from the Health, Community and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 14 January 2014. The following points were noted:

Gloucestershire data confirms that suicide rates have fluctuated in line with the national average. The Gloucestershire Suicide Partnership Prevention Forum

had set up a group to identify local areas which could be monitored for potential suicide risk. Data released by Public Health England showed that hospital stays for self-harm in Gloucestershire in 2011/12 were significantly worse than the England average

The task group had considered a report monitoring the service changes at Cheltenham General Hospital and how they affect the emergency & urgent care. The number of complaints was in line with the number before the service change and there was a positive improvement on waiting times at A & E. Recruitment was still an issue but consultation was continuing between consultant and junior doctors. Concerns re diverts and inter-hospital transfers have been addressed and more information on this and on discharge figures from both Emergency Departments would be included in future reports.

Consideration of the independent review ambulance red category is ongoing and more information should be available by mid-February. The group has concerns about the South West Ambulance Service Trust response times. More first responders are being recruited and more defibrillators have been purchased.

There are still breaches in mixed sex accommodation and the task group will receive a briefing note on this.

Councillor Helena McClosky reported on the meeting of the Police and Crime Panel held on 6 February 2014.

The Panel approved the Police Commissioner's draft budget of £106.489 million which proposed a 1.99% increase in the Police related element of council tax. For a Band D Council Tax property this will equate to £4.05 for the year. Members were told that funding from the precept for the following two years would be frozen subject to any unforeseen emergency expenditure.

An additional priority was added to the Police and Crime Plan relating to Cyber Crime. This is about improving the capability of the Constabulary to protect people from internet crime and anti-social behaviour on social network sites whether at their place of work or in their own homes. A large part of the activity will be around educating the public and educating officers in terms of how to handle incidents of this nature.

The Commissioner also has an agreement with the Chief Constable to maintain the current numbers of Police Officers and PCSOs. Some of the additional money from the precept would help to ensure that this was possible.

At the last Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting Councillor Barbara Driver queried the number of PCSOs manning the Police Information Point on the Promenade. The answer was that it was a temporary measure to engage passers-by in the consultation on the draft budget.

7. CABINET BRIEFING

Councillor Steve Jordan presented an update as outlined in the Briefing Paper, circulated with the agenda.

In response to comments from members he undertook to circulate information regarding the council's response to the Government consultation on local authority car parking policies and enforcement.

The chair asked whether more information could be provided to the committee and to the public on two items in the Cabinet forward plan regarding the triennial review of the Sexual Entertainment Venue Policy and the Housing and Homelessness Strategy Action Plan Update 2014-15. The Leader indicated that reports on both these issues would be made public as part of the agenda papers for Cabinet on 18 March. If the committee needed any more information he would be happy to provide it.

8. UPDATE FROM THE CHELTENHAM DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

The chair welcomed Jeremy Williamson, Managing Director of the Cheltenham Development Task Force, to give an update to the committee on the work of the task force. In his presentation he provided a progress report on key sites, the public realm, transport issues and future targets. The presentation is attached to the minutes.

Prior to the meeting, the chair had received some questions from a local residents' group which she had forwarded to Mr Williamson and requested that he address these during his presentation.

In response to a question regarding the governance arrangements for the task group, Mr Williamson informed the meeting that the initiation of the task group was approved by Council in December 2009 and established in January 2010 as an advisory body. The membership was drawn from Councillors, business and community representatives with support from key Borough Council and County Council officers. The business plan was approved by Cabinet and financial implications by Council. The lead Cabinet Member is Councillor Andy McKinlay.

The officer undertook to follow up queries raised from members in respect of feedback on the Bath Road shopping area traffic arrangements and the report on air quality if Boots Corner were to be closed to cars.

In considering the public realm, members voiced concerns about the appearance of the pedestrianised areas, the maintenance of paving slabs and the use of concrete in their place where slabs had been removed. The officer explained that slabs would be lifted in areas used by vehicles, including delivery vehicles, as they are not designed to bear such weights. The High Street will trial the same system that exists in the Promenade between the bollards and if this proves successful, this will be the template used at Boots Corner.

A Member asked why the Promenade couldn't become totally pedestrianised throughout its whole length as it had the potential to be developed into a town square. The officer responded that the traffic system here had been modelled by the County Council to allow buses entering Cheltenham from the south to gain easy passage through town and therefore it was not feasible to pedestrianise the whole promenade.

A member suggested that stakeholders were not adequately represented on the task force and in particular residents groups were not included. Mr Williamson

refuted any suggestion that the task group did not provide proper representation and added that he was always happy to respond to requests for information from Members or any local groups. He advised that in setting up the task group one of the aims had been to try and get an element of commercial experience onto the task group which could help move forward some of the projects which up to that point had stalled. He invited members to put forward any suggestions if they felt that there was a need to revisit its make-up.

Members were reassured that Third Sector transport and Star Centre minibuses were within the definition of buses and were therefore allowed the same access to the town centre as commercial buses.

The Chair thanked Mr Williamson for his presentation.

9. DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGY 2013-14

The Strategy and Engagement Manager, Richard Gibson, introduced the report on the development of the corporate strategy action plan 2014-15 which was circulated to all members with the agenda. He explained that the corporate strategy action plan for 2014-15 was being prepared and was due to go to Council for approval on 31 March 2014. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to consider the draft strategy and the officer undertook to report any comments or concerns raised at the meeting to Cabinet.

The following matters were raised in respect of the outcomes:

Cheltenham has a clean and well-maintained environment- funds for the “Don’t Rubbish Cheltenham” campaign are still included in the budget even though the campaign is no longer running. A Member requested clarification.

A member questioned whether the Town Hall capital review would support better delivery of arts and culture and thought it would be better suited to supporting the economy.

Communities feel safe and are safe – a member requested that drug issues are included along with alcohol.

People have access to decent and affordable housing – a Member asked what mechanisms are being used to ensure the outcome is achieved as they were not spelt out in the report. The officer informed the meeting that the draft strategy only includes proposed projects that are in addition to “business as usual”.

Our residents enjoy a strong sense of community and involved in resolving local issues – a Member thought it important that all stakeholders are fully engaged. In addition councillors want disabled groups to be included in the formulation of transport plans.

The chair thanked Members for their comments and asked the officer to take these back to Cabinet for their consideration.

10. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Strategy and Engagement Manager, Richard Gibson, introduced the report – Review of the council’s performance to the end of quarter 3 (Oct-Dec 2013). The report summarised how the council performed in regard to the published milestones, performance indicators and outcomes set out in the 2013-2014 action plan.

He invited Members to make any comments or observations which he would feed back to Cabinet.

It was highlighted that the figures are as at the end of quarter 3 so that the report compares a 12 month target with a 9 month actual performance. In response to a point raised, the officer agreed that it would be useful to include figures from the comparable quarter 2013 to see the trends in the council’s performance. For example last year there were 7.6% milestone graded red as opposed to 9% this year.

The meeting focused on the performance indicators which are unlikely to meet the target by year end and are listed on page 3 and 4 of the report.

Percentage of household waste, reused, recycled and composted – the council is considering what other authorities do in respect of kerbside recycling and it will also consider how best to promote the schemes that are currently in place. Overall footfall at leisure@ - targets have been met in the past but the usage of the facilities is very much dependant on the weather.

A member suggested there could be more promotion of free swims available to under 16s

Number of GP referrals – the council is working with the Clinical Commissioning Group which is interested in the programme and will try to promote more usage.

The chair thanked Members for their comments and asked the officer to take these back to Cabinet for their consideration.

11. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

A summary of progress on all the scrutiny task groups had been circulated with the agenda papers.

12. DEPRIVATION

Councillor Chris Coleman, as chair of the scrutiny task group, had been asked to attend the meeting to provide an update to the committee on work done to date and future plans. He tabled a report on the Hidden Deprivation in the Town Centre which identified four areas that the task group had looked at. These covered crime and disorder, housing, environmental quality and community integration and contained suggestions and feedback. The group had not yet considered education and health issues but those may be included in any future work. The task group had met six times and will present its recommendations shortly.

Councillor Coleman took the opportunity to give some feedback on his experience as chair of the scrutiny task group. He suggested that when a councillor puts forward an idea for a scrutiny topic, then the O&S committee should take more time to define the terms of reference carefully before passing them on to the task group. He would also have found it useful if member roles had been more clearly defined at the start as this particular task group had

proved to be a lot more work than originally envisaged. In his view officer support was essential, particularly support from Democratic Services and this was something that needed to be considered by the committee before setting up a task group. The task group also needed to put time into preparing potential areas of questioning before inviting people to give evidence to a task group. He suggested that some training for members on how to get the best out of a scrutiny task group would be beneficial.

The Democratic Services Manager thanked him for his feedback. She highlighted that when the new scrutiny arrangements were put into place it was never envisaged that Democratic Services would be in a position to support every scrutiny task group. She was pleased to hear that the facilitation support offered by Democratic Services was valued by task groups and this was an issue that could be discussed further with the chair and vice-chair of this committee.

The chair thanked the task group for its work and assured the meeting that its work will be carried forward.

13. ALLOTMENTS

Councillor Roger Whyborn, Cabinet Member Sustainability, presented the progress report on recommendations from the Allotments Scrutiny Task Group. The review of allotments was initiated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2012 and a task group was set up. The report and recommendations of the scrutiny task group were considered by the Overview & Scrutiny committee in January 2013 and the report considered by Council on 22nd February 2013 at which time it was resolved that £600,000 of the Midwinter receipt would be set aside to fund the provision of additional allotments in Cheltenham. The report was considered by Cabinet in March 2013 and resolved that the recommendation would be approved subject to feasibility and resources, that the council would enter into new tenancy agreements with allotment holders and the Overview & Scrutiny committee would undertake a review of the recommendations.

It was noted by the meeting that the Garden Share project, funded and supported by the Echo was mooted 2 years ago but had not been a success.

There was a high demand for allotments in the South of Cheltenham which was being considered by the council. It is likely that new allotments would be linked to future housing developments.

As a member of the scrutiny task group, Councillor McCloskey was heartened to see the real progress that had been made on implementing the recommendations and was encouraged to see how the voluntary wardens had taken their new responsibilities on board.

The chair thanked the Cabinet Member and the Allotments Officer for attending the meeting.

14. CEMETERY AND CREMATORIUM

Councillor Chris Ryder, chair of the scrutiny task group – Crematorium and Cemetery, provided details of meetings held since the last Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting in February. On the 15th January the task group attended a

meeting between officers, councillors, the manager of the Crematorium and Cemetery and Funeral Directors to give them an opportunity to air their concerns regarding the cremators and any other issues they wished to raise. There was a technical update on the Cremators and Abatement system. £50,000 had been spent on remedial work. It was hoped that both cremators would be up and running satisfactory, without the abatement process in place. The meeting was advised us that it was not illegal to operate the cremators without the abatement process, and currently the abatement equipment had been decommissioned as it was interfering with the effective operation of the cremators. It appears that many crematoriums are operating without abatement in place. The Council is obliged to pay £50.00 per cremation into a fund 'CAMEO' burden sharing scheme for each cremation which is unabated.

It was mentioned that other funeral operators across Britain may be interested in seeking to take on the management of Crematoriums. This may prove a risk to the Council.

A meeting took place on 30th January between the task group, Cemetery Manager, Grahame Lewis, Mark Woodward, Tom Mimmagh and Councillor Roger Whyborn where the confidential consultant's reports were considered. Normal working patterns for staff had resumed and the overtime costs had reduced. Some of the outdoor grounds maintenance team had been trained to work in the Crematorium, partly to cover long-term sickness issues and partly to cover some of the shifts required as a result of the problems that they had been experiencing. Additional agency staff had been employed to ensure that the Cemetery's appearance did not deteriorate as a result of the redeployment of CBC staff. Councillor Ryder congratulated Rob Hainsworth and his team for their efforts in maintaining a good standard at the crematorium with these issues around them.

A further meeting took place on site on the 27th February which considered future parking for visitors at the Cemetery, especially when attending funeral services.

Councillor Ryder also referred to a progress update she had received from the crematorium manager. He had advised that following the completion of the remedial work, they had now had use of both machines for 3 weeks. There have been some further issues during this period, but this has not resulted in any cremator down-time. She also highlighted that staff at the crematorium were still lacking confidence in the new equipment and it would take a sustained period of trouble free operation before that was restored.

The Task Group will meet again to formulate its recommendations and a report and recommendations will be presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in April.

Councillor Ryder thanked her colleagues on the task group and the Democratic Services Manager for her support to the group.

A member asked if there was any legal recompense for the faulty equipment. The Head of Legal services confirmed that One Legal had provided legal advice on this issue but this could not be discussed in open session. A confidential advice note on this matter would be available to the scrutiny task group later

that week.

A member raised concerns about the vulnerability of the cremators and asked whether there was a case for putting in an additional cremator.

Councillor Whyborn, as the Cabinet Member responsible for the crematorium, was invited to comment. He thanked the chair of the task group for a fair report and he indicated that he had already responded to a number of the points raised in his briefing that had been e-mailed to members. The council was in contact with other councils who have used Crawfords equipment. The consultant's initial evaluation was that two cremators offered sufficient capacity even when factoring in planned maintenance. He was confident that they were close to being a position to introduce a planned maintenance programme for the equipment going forward. He too was keen to emphasise the sterling job that had been done by staff at the crematorium.

The chair thanked the task group for their update and looked forward to their full report in April.

15. DOG FOULING IN CHELTENHAM

Councillor Penny Hall, chair of the task group, presented the final report which had been circulated with the agenda.

A review of dog fouling in Cheltenham was initiated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2013 following local concern at what was becoming a worsening problem. The Chair of the task group reported that subsequent to the publication of the task group report she had been informed that the Council had received numerous complaints from football clubs who hire pitches on council playing fields (including King George V, The Beeches, Naunton Park, The Burrows and Whaddon Rec) about the unacceptable level of dog fouling. The football clubs felt that they were paying a substantial amount of money for the use of the pitches and were urging the council to take some action to alleviate the problem. The Chair of the task group advised that this information would be included as an extra piece of evidence to the group's work.

A discussion ensued on the report. It was noted that dog fouling was worse during the winter months due to the darker mornings and early evenings when it was also harder for dog owners to keep track of their animal's movements. Members highlighted the importance of raising awareness including in schools as these children would be the dog owners of tomorrow. The idea of catching offenders in particular hotspot areas by using mobile CCTV was welcomed. One member urged that bins should be appropriately sited. Several members commented that the situation was growing increasingly worse in Montpellier Gardens and Warden Hill.

The Chair referred to comments received from a member who could not be present which wholeheartedly supported the recommendation for adequate enforcement despite the resource issues involved. It had been suggested that car parking attendants could assist in this but the Chair of the Task Group said this would not be possible due to their service agreements with the County Council. In response to a comment on the use of the blue stencil the Chair said that CPOs had found these useful as it brought dog fouling to the attention of the small minority who were irresponsible.

Councillor Hall thanked members, officers, Community Protection Officers and Ubico officers for their ongoing vigilance and actions to reduce the problem.

RESOLVED THAT

The recommendations of the Dog Fouling in Cheltenham Scrutiny Task Group are endorsed for onward recommendations to Cabinet.

16. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

Councillor Nigel Britter reported that the s106 task group has had its first meeting and will provide a short update to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting in April.

Councillor Barbara Driver felt that it was important for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to have an update from charities or any other public bodies receiving financial support from Cheltenham Borough Council and would include this on the agenda of future meetings

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will take place on Thursday 3 April at 6 pm.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

Barbara Driver
Chairman